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Mapping the Migrant City: Presentations of the Migrant Experience in the Contemporary European Novel 1995-2015

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Contents

Abstract

Mapping the Migrant City: Presentations of the Migrant Experience in the Contemporary European Novel 1995-2015

This thesis is a comparative investigation into contemporary novels of migration to three European capital cities: London, Paris and Rome. It uses a range of approaches to analyse the tripartite relationship between the novel, the city and the lived experience of migration, arguing that literature of migration maps and re-maps the city, just as migrants themselves chart, challenge and change the ways in which the city perceives itself. It provides a wide overview of selected novels of migration to the city since 1995, with close readings of those most relevant to urban space and migration.

It does this by looking at four aspects of urban experience within literature: firstly, the use and ownership of public space; secondly, encounters with friends and strangers; thirdly, urban domestic space and the multiple constructions of 'home'; and lastly the work carried out by migrants to challenge dominant narratives of the city's history, memory, and geography. While it situates itself within comparative literary studies, the thesis borrows its understanding of urban public space from literary geography, and investigates discourses of power in the city by charting the ways in which migrants disrupt the continuity of the established order. Moreover, it uses a comparative framework of three major European capital cities in French, English and Italian to demonstrate literary parallels and influences across the region, situating the three geographic fields into a historicised, transnational and postcolonial context.

Keywords:

novel of migration; migration literature; contemporary novel; comparative literature; literary geography; Paris; Rome; London; multiculturalism and diversity; migrant lived experience; urban space; situated history and memory; construction of migrant space; borders and literature.

Dedications

This work is dedicated to the memory of more than 36,000 people who died since 1993 trying to enter Fortress Europe.[1] Each of them had a story, and as so many are no longer able to tell it, we must listen all the harder to the stories that we are given, in whatever manner they are delivered.

***

I owe a debt of gratitude to my first supervisor, Dr Kwadwo Osei-Nyame Jnr., and to Professor Wen-Chin Ouyang who provided crucial supervisory support in the last months, as well as my other supervisors and the SOAS staff who helped enormously with this work: Dr Sarah Pett, Dr Karima Laachir, Dr Parvathi Raman and Professor Francesca Orsini. I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to Professor Rachael Gilmour and Dr Louisa Egbunike for their interest, enthusiasm and feedback. Many thanks also to SOAS University of London for funding this project.

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[1] Amnesty International, “The Human Cost of Fortress Europe: Human Rights Violations against Migrants and Refugees at Europe’s Borders” (London: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2014).

***

From the east
Of his small emerald island
He always comes back groggily groggily

Comes back to sands
Of a grey metallic soar
To surge of wheels
To dull North Circular roar[2]

"Island Man", Grace Nichols

***

There's no new land, my friend, no
New sea; for the city will follow you,
In the same streets you'll wander endlessly,
The same mental suburbs slip from youth to age,
In the same house go white at last -
The city is a cage.
No other places, always this
Your earthly landfall, and no ship exists
To take you from yourself.[3]

"The City", Lawrence Durrell after C. P. Cavafy

***

There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.[4]

Walter Benjamin

[2] Grace Nichols, *The Fat Black Woman's Poems* (Little, Brown, 1984), 32–33.
[3] Lawrence Durrell, *Justine*, (Faber & Faber, 2017), 221.
[4]Walter Benjamin, cited in "Frankfurt School: On the Concept of History by Walter Benjamin," 7, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm. (Accessed 17th September 2019).

Introduction

In the closing pages of Igiaba Scego's most recent novel, *Adua*, the eponymous heroine stands in front of Rome's Termini Station looking around her at the Piazza dei Cinquecento.[1] She has just taken her young Somali husband, Titanic/Ahmed, to catch a train for Germany, where he hopes to find work. Piazza dei Cinquecento is the same place where she found him a couple of years earlier; much younger than her, traumatised from a clandestine Mediterranean boat-crossing, street-homeless and drinking from a bottle of cheap gin.

> Piazza dei Cinquecento, linked with my story like no other. Piazza of migrants, of first arrivals, of all departures, of my many regrets. In this piazza so disconnected from itself, I have found and lost myself a thousand times.[2]

From her position in the busy *piazza* Adua, who settled in Rome in the early 1970s, contemplates the meetings and the departures she has lived there. She is in her fifties or sixties, a 'Vecchia Lira' compared to the more recent asylum seekers and refugees she now sees in Piazza dei Cinquecento, positioned halfway between her father, who came to Rome in the 1930s, and Titanic, who arrived just recently and is now moving on. [3] Here, in this place of transit, of transience, Somalis have settled over the past two decades: 'I had to cross Piazza dei Cinquecento to get to that strange Somalia which had grown up in the back streets of the railway district.'[4] The area around the station is ethnically diverse, a representation of the new Rome in which around nine percent of the population comes

[1] Igiaba Scego, *Adua* (Giunti, 2015). [my translation: see **Appendix 1: Notes on Translation**].
[2] Scego, 169.
[3] 'Old lira', a reference to the Somali immigrants who arrived before the adoption of a common European currency in 2002.
[4] Scego, *Adua*, 169.

from a different country.[5] 'Behind the station they sold that sweet *halwa* I was crazy for.'[6] While Adua's own home is in a more affluent part of town, Termini is an important centre for a number of different reasons. In recent years (and long after Adua's own arrival in Rome by plane) migration patterns have changed due to new restrictions on air travel for irregular migrants, causing a huge increase in clandestine arrival by boat to Lampedusa and Southern Italy, and making Termini station more than ever a first point of arrival for Somali (and other) migrants into Italy's capital. Adua further reminds us that while it now symbolises a migrant present, the piazza is also a reminder of Italy's colonial past, named after the five hundred Italians who died in one of Italy's first military interventions in Ethiopia.[7] 'And it was there, in that *piazza* that Italy had dedicated to its soldiers dead in East Africa, that I had built for myself a love made of papier-mâché.'[8]

Adua, Igiaba Scego's fourth novel, is composed of short chapters narrated by three different voices in turn; Adua herself, a third-person description of her father's life in Italy, Ethiopia and Somalia in the 1930s, and a free monologue in the voice of Adua's father. The narrative alternates between different stories and different moments in time, creating a disorienting effect and positioning Adua's contemporary story within a broader historical context,

[5] In 2009 the 'popolazione straniera' (foreign population) of Rome including naturalized Italians and foreign children born in Italy was 405,657, out of a metropolitan area population of 4,321,244. This figure does not take into account a growing number of *clandestini* (undocumented people) in the Italian capital. (ISTAT (The National Institute for Statistics) from http://demo.istat.it/str2009/index.html, accessed 4th May 2016).
[6] Scego, *Adua*, 169.
[7] Piazza dei Cinquecento is named after Italian soldiers killed at the Battle of Dogali, an early Ethiopian victory in 1887, one of the events which led up to the First Italo-Ethiopian War of 1895.
[8] Scego, *Adua*, 169.

describing Italian Fascist incursions into the Horn of Africa in the 1930s, life growing up in both rural and urban Somalia in the 1960s, and the glamorous yet racist and sexually exploitative world of the Rome film industry in the 1970s.

Like all Igiaba Scego's fiction, the novel can be considered (and has been received) as 'letteratura della migrazione' (literature of migration).[9] Examining it at such, it is immediately possible to identify similarities and differences with the longer-established body of fiction on the theme of migration in France and Italy.

> Whereas Anglophone and Francophone African texts are often an overt j'accuse, directed to a society where diasporic Africans are marginalized and discriminated, Afro-Italian texts address an Italian readership with a much more conciliatory and reassuring tone, almost as if they were saying: we do not know each other yet, but we are here to stay and become part of the country, and for this reason we are going to tell you our stories so that we can then be friends.[10]

Italian literature of migration, as will be explored further in the Literature Review, is a new and growing field, one which barely existed before 1989, and thus provides material for a fruitful comparison with the more often studied French and UK texts on the same theme. Igiaba Scego herself is one of a growing group of young Italian/migrant authors whose work explores new Italian identities. As well as writing frequently in Italian newspapers, Scego is the co-founder of the website and review El Ghibli.[11]

This brief study of *Adua* reveals other focal points that might be explored within a comprehensive survey of literature of migration and the European city. Scego's novel is rich in historical context (she includes brief historical explanations in an appendix) and explores

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[9] Gabriella Grasso, "Adua: Intervista a Igiaba Scego," September 12, 2015, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:180:0031:0059:EN:PDF.
[10] Sabrina Brancato, "From Routes to Roots: Afrosporic Voices in Italy," *Callaloo* 30, no. 2 (2007): 653–61.
[11] http://www.el-ghibli.org/ (accessed 5th May 2016).

connections between the colonial and post-colonial eras in both Italy and the Horn of Africa. In her novel, migration is presented as a complex series of events which might include many different experiences: thus Titanic/Ahmed travels on to Germany, while Adua's father returns to settle in Somalia. And, importantly, the city itself is presented as a crucial element in Adua's story; as a plotting device and meeting point, as a postcolonial space, as a connection to other places, and as a migrant centre which itself offers different opportunities to different characters. The novel reveals both link and fissures in Rome's Somali community, and presents the city as a site of possibility within which other such links can be forged between different marginalised people; as when Adua's father begins a friendship with an Italian-Jewish family.

This example opens up some of the major concerns of the thesis. European cities have been shaped and even transformed by migration, and recent migrations, from Schengen free movement to the so-called 'Refugee Crisis', are currently attracting a great deal of attention in the media, in parliaments and within the academy. My thesis will combine four core research areas: textual and literary mappings of the contemporary European migrant city; discussions of migration, different reflections on how migration shapes narratives of identity and, within literature, encodes identity; migratory movement and more generally travel within postcolonial literary theory in Italian, French and English; and a comparison of contemporary literary studies, in order to map the migrant city as it is told and retold in very recent novels such as *Adua*.

This thesis comprises a comparative study of recent literature of migration, from 1995 to 2015 in reference to the European capital city, taking as its three sites for investigation

London, Paris and Rome.[12] These are not only major European capitals, but cities with a historic role of significance as perceived 'centres' of European global dominance. The thesis focuses on the city and not the nation state, arguing that in this contemporary era the geographic scale of 'global cities' reveals certain shared traits between the three (and indeed Nairobi, Cairo, New York or Tokyo) which are different to what the capitals share with the rest of their own countries**.**

The thesis situates itself within comparative literature,[13] but employs interdisciplinary techniques and theory from geography and urban studies in order to approach the city from a number of angles. It also considers the three cities through a postcolonial lens, looking at the cultural and political ideas which shape understanding of the nation state and globalization as well as issues of community and multiculturalism. It looks at places within the city as sites of challenge or struggle, and attempts by migrants and works of migrant fiction to map and re-map the city to effect political and attitudinal change. It also considers, in light of migrant experience, the city as a fantasy, the city as a potential, the city as it is dreamed and reimagined within fiction. Using discourse analysis on these novels of migrations, the thesis reconciles elements of my four wider research interests: the ways in which the contemporary novel works, the global city, the changing role of literature within changing socio-political boundaries and lastly the experience of contemporary migration into the European Union.

[12] A further justification of the choice of cities is provided in the Literature Review.
[13] (with a wry nod to the European roots of the discipline).

The thesis offers answers to the following research questions: how is the city reimagined, re-written and represented within fiction of migration? Moreover, what light do these novels shed upon themes of 'settling', 'travelling' and 'questioning/dissenting'? It discusses the ways in which new texts about global movement and international migration write about and against the three 'urban and colonial centres', looking at subtle (and occasionally not so subtle) ways in which these novels undermine mainstream representations of the city by offering alternative narratives, and by challenging homogenous or one-sided representations of both 'receiving' and 'sending' cultures and societies. It uses a comparative framework to discuss important differences and similarities between Italian, Francophone and UK fiction of migration, considering the historical background of the three regions, including colonisation, migration policy, assimilation and multiculturalism. From this, it discusses what the texts studied reveal about current attitudes to alterity, including popular, media and political representations of migration and migrants.

Finally, the thesis attempts to pinpoint the specific role of fiction and the novel in particular in portraying migration and the migrant's experience within the cities, considering the ways in which the novels conform to literary convention and tradition, as well as when and how they transform the novel form through their choice of language, structure, characterisation and description of place. The central argument which runs through each chapter is that different elements of the city and urban life are remapped and transformed through these novels.

Outline of Research

This thesis looks at novels of migration with reference to the contemporary European city, describing itself as *mapping* the migrant city, by which it means the process of examining, recording and communicating urban space through the lens of migration fiction. By looking at the description, use and symbolism of different elements of the city in recent novels, it intends to prove, in various ways, its central claim: that within migration fiction, the city is changed by contemporary and recent migration, and migrants are changed by the city.

The approach adopted encompasses three major European cities, on which a brief background of migration fiction is provided in the Literature Review, below. It relies for its primary understanding of urban space on definitions suggested by Henri Lefevbre, drawing its definition of space itself from de Certeau, and especially the parallels between the functioning of space and discourse.[14]

> De Certeau captures the sociality of space in terms of the likeness of space and discourse. Like discourse, space acquires its meaning and actualizes itself in practice. The relationship space has with place is like that of discourse and language. Place is the order of things without movement or action, similar to the unspoken words of the dictionary, prior to their investment in speech and their articulation according not only to linguistic rules, but also to the rules of discourse.
> The sociality of the space means that "space is a practiced place".[15]

However each chapter employs a slightly different approach to migration fiction in the city, accompanied by a relevant and contemporary theoretical background. Two key theories stemming from Lefebvre help to structure this work: firstly that '(social) space is a (social) product', which is crucial in framing this thesis and enabling it to recreate (certain curated

[14] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (University of California Press, 2011), 117.
[15] Salwa Ismail, *Political Life in Cairo's New Quarters* (University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xxxvi.

aspects of) the city through a discourse analysis of fictional works and the migrant bodies which populate them.[16] Lefebvre thought of the city as an *oeuvre*, a work in progress constructed daily by those that live in it or use it, and this thesis attempts to demonstrate the usefulness of this conceptualisation through close readings of a group of fictional texts describing the experiences of a single group of people. David Harvey goes on to expand this into a theory of 'territorial social justice', arguing that the use of public space, the act of occupying it or the struggle to reconceive it within a commons, is key in progressive movements. Emancipatory demands can be better understood in terms of the physical space they claim.[17]

The idea of the right to the city, with its implicit reading of the city as a whole, has also raised the question of divisions which split power and hierarchise not only urban populations but urban space itself. In his works on policing and politicising space in the Paris *banlieues*, Mustafa Dikec suggests that the categorisation of the outer city as 'other' is a major barrier to its occupants assuming spatially inflected ownership of Paris as a whole.

> I would like to argue, however, that the challenge, rather than looking at the malaise of suburbs and to recognize the City as the Same on seeing its Other, is to look at the very city in its totality, at the very society and its space to discover the suburb and to problematize the city. The suburb is not self-contained; its spaces and social relations are not produced in a vacuum. And conceiving the city in its totality is as important as recognizing its diversity.[18]

Dikec is not the only critic of the 'right to the city' on the basis of the different social relations that mark different areas, and he demonstrates that migrant bodies are often

[16] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. (Wiley-Blackwell, 1991), 26.
[17] David Harvey, *Social Justice and the City* (University of Georgia Press, 2010), 116.
[18] Mustafa Dikeç, "Police, Politics, and the Right to the City," *GeoJournal* 58, no. 2/3 (2002): 95, https://doi.org/10.1023/B:GEJO.0000010828.40053.de.

among those who are both spatially and politically marginalised. This project attempts to recentre the migrant body as a key site of potential power, as well as disrupting the conceptualisation of the city as a series of concentric circles, with power and importance diminishing from the centre to the peripheries. It does so not only by describing migrant strategies for creating new centres, but by an investigation of the migrant networks and social relations which construct and maintain the 'migrant city'.

Secondly, Lefebvre's original declaration of the 'right to the city' would influence several of the contemporary writings on cities to which this project refers, and while it has been complicated by recent scholars, provides an alternative lens of belonging and ownership to contemporary conceptions of *national citizenship* at state level.[19]

> The *right to the city* cannot be conceived of as a simple visiting right or as a return to traditional cities. It can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed *right to urban life*. It does not matter whether the urban fabric encloses the countryside and what survives of peasant life, as long as the 'urban', place of encounter, priority of use value, inscription in space of a time promoted to the rank of a supreme resource among all resources, finds its morphological base and its practico-material realization.[20]

Questioned and re-codified in recent years, this 'right to the city' is a key concept within recent academic study, especially since the protest movements of the last two decades, notably the *Occupy* movement in New York, London and elsewhere in the world, and the protests across the Arab world which began in 2011. David Harvey draws on Lefevbre in his attempts to categorise and analyse different types of space, using Lefebvre's concept of the

[19] Lefebvre, *Writings On Cities*, trans. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) 158.
[20] Lefebvre, 158.

'relational nature of space' to chart the different kinds of space across two axes: from material to representational, and from absolute to relational.

> [S]pace is neither absolute, relative or relational in itself, but it can become one or all simultaneously depending on the circumstances. The problem of the proper conceptualization of space is resolved through human practice with respect to it. In other words, there are no philosophical answers to philosophical questions that arise over the nature of space - the answers lie in human practice.[21]

These categories of space are particularly useful for the model of the city explored within this thesis. This project examines the city not merely as material space, but as it is represented in works of fiction. As such it becomes not only 'representational' but certainly also 'relational'. For example, in several of the novels, a fictionalised representation of a call centre, the small shopfront usually found in migrant areas, figures in the narration.

This call centre has more than one role. Firstly it is a representation of a material reality: in 'migrant' areas such as the 18e *arrondissement* of Paris, there are many call centres. This is connected to a material human situation; certain people need to make frequent international calls and don't necessarily have the means to do so at home. In addition, call centres are situated into a moment in time (one which, coincidentally, maps onto the scope of this thesis, 1995- 2015). They rely on internet connections to provide phone services, they follow a decline in street-based phone boxes, and they are once again becoming less common, or broadening their range of services to include money transfer and phone repairs, since smart phones became nearly ubiquitous even among those on a low income.

[21] David Harvey, "Space as a Keyword," in *David Harvey*, ed. Noel Castree and Derek Gregory (Blackwell, 2006), 5.

At the same time, the call centre figures in these novels as a meeting place; a spot both to catch up with one's friends and to make connections across migrant communities. In Amara Lakhous' novel *Divorcio all'Islamica a viale Marconi* (*Divorce Islamic-style in Viale Marconi*) the protagonist uses the 'Little Cairo' call centre as an entry into the local North African community (not for particularly noble ends). It is here that 'Issa' finds a place to live, not with North Africans but with a Bangladeshi.

> "Friend, a place to sleep would help me to save money."
> "Could you manage to share with eleven people?"[22]

This is an alternative space of solidarity and community building; but it is also an introduction into a world outside of Italian legal norms, in which those eager to save money live in cramped, squalid housing which costs them less but earns slum landlord considerably more. '"I want to rest, but not now and not here" "When then? "When I return to Bangladesh and get married."'[23] Soon Issa is in the call centre not to make calls, but as the centre of his new community. "I passed by Little Cairo to thank Akram for putting a good word in."[24]

To look at the call centre - and, in the rest of this study, the city - in Harvey's terms is to see it as multiple different kinds of place simultaneously.

> When I look at a house, for example, I recognize it as a physical and legal entity that situates it in absolute space. I also recognize its position in relative space given its location with respect to places of employment, recreation, services and the flows of people, electricity, water, and money that sustain it as a living habitat. But then I also understand its relationality to global property markets, changing interest rates, climatic change, the sense of what is or is not a historic building, and its significance as a place of personal and collective memories, sentimental attachments, and the

[22] Lakhous, *Divorzio all'islamica a viale Marconi*, (E/O, 2012), 48. [my translation]
[23] Lakhous, 48-9.
[24] Lakhous, 49.

> like. What happens to the house over time can only be fully understood, I argue, by working through effects constituted through the three forms of spatio-temporality simultaneously. While this is hard to do in any easy empiricist or positivist sense, the insights that come from such a dialectical approach are as exciting and innovative as they are often stunning. [25]

The call centre, too, can be studied as a building, certainly a building which is markedly similar not only across European city centres but around the world, as the hub in a network of human relations, as the marker of an area with a diverse population with connections across the world, as a phenomenon from a particular era in the globalisation of telecommunications.

When the literary representation of migrant space is considered, the figurative role of the call centre can be widened further. In *Madre Piccola* (*Little Mother*) by Cristina Ali Farah, both physical distance and relational alienation is signalled through a lengthy phone call between Taageere, a Somali refugee now in the USA, and Shukri, the mother of his child in Rome. '*Halow?* Hello, Shukri? It's Taageere here, your ex-husband.'[26] Taageere is struggling to express his complex emotions over a wide physical distance but also he is attempting to conduct quite intimate personal communication in an impersonal public space. 'No, calm down. I'm in the call centre today. It's like I told you here. The owner is a Somali, there are five cabins. And they also give you a good rate to call Somalia. Yes, just like Xassan's call centre.'[27]

A parallel is established between the two Somali run businesses, and the diasporic conversation is linked also to calling home - to Somalia. The business is thus an important

[25] Harvey, "Space as a Keyword," in *David Harvey, A Critical Reader*, (Blackwell, 2006) 6.
[26] Farah Cristina Ali, *Madre piccola* (Frassinelli, 2007), 57.
[27] Ali, *Madre piccola*. (Xassan runs a similar business in Rome).

point on a map of the Somali diaspora. As such, it can be understood as a place which transcends distance, a place which echoes across the world. Throughout the novel the call centre is a motif which implies the struggle to remain united as a family and a community through time and space.

Finally, there is a loaded symbolism to the use of call centres in several of the novels. In Fatou Diome's *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* (*The Belly of the Atlantic*), Salie is in France while her younger brother Madické remains in a coastal village in Senegal. As the novel opens, they are trying to watch the same football match at the same time. When the only television in the fishing village breaks, Madické runs to his local call centre to call his sister's home; in France, she is certain to be able to follow the match to the end.

- Allô! Yes it's me, call me at the call centre.
- Madické? How are you?[28]

Salie asks about her family; the teenage boy is more intent on finding out if Italy has beaten France. 'Only a violent nostalgia, the overwhelming plea of an anxious mother or an impatient brother compels me to dial 00221. I pick up the telephone. It's black. It should have been red, red for the blood that I spill in France Telecom's name.'[29] The demands of those back home cost Sadie much in money and 'blood'; her brother cannot understand the financial pressures on a student in France. The familial bond, painful though it may be, is stronger than the external financial pressures that Sadie experiences, yet the simple phone call is described in terms of a lack of communication between the migrant and her family, and the call centre in Senegal represents not ease of dialogue but the obstacles that hinder it and render it unequal. Throughout the short novel, the call centre stands for the pressure

[28] Fatou Diome, *Le ventre de l'Atlantique* (Librairie Générale Française, 2005), 37.
[29] Diome, 38.

and responsibility of caring for those who have not migrated; the strong emotional tie which binds across continents, and the fragility of such an international connection: the line might fail at any minute. A power imbalance is denoted: Sadie can choose to call at any time, whereas Madické must get credit at the call centre merely to make a short call. In this example, the call centre conveys both distance and proximity.

This thesis applies Harvey's (following de Certeau and Lefebvre) understanding of these multiple ways to read space on a larger scale to the city as a whole, considering it as inherently linked to other urban space, yet as a distinct geographical unit. It explores how literature of migration destabilises and simultaneously reinforces the city's self-image.

Attitudes to Migration

Etienne Balibar's research into contemporary migration takes him to the 'borders' of Europe, and (despite the UK's special border status, and the ongoing Brexit chaos) this project tends to consider some of the parallels migratory journeys into the European Union. In his essay "At the Borders of Citizenship", Balibar posits a holistic perspective on 'the European sphere' as a public space, discussing the "contained" (or semi-contained) space of Europe and the borders that mark it. In the contemporary moment, any discussion of bordering practices at the frontiers of European states must also consider the bordering which exists outside of Europe: in Libya or in Turkey with the complicity of the EU and its member states; on the physical borders of the European Union (as it stands at time of writing, including the UK) and the everyday bordering practices which mark daily life for migrants (and for many other people) within the three urban centres discussed. Balibar does not shift the scale from nation state to the EU in order to propose a different scale of

citizenship; rather, his work criticises citizenship as it currently functions across the whole region as inherently productive of a hierarchised, racially-inflected violence.

> [T]he introduction of a notion of European citizenship based on national membership within the European Union, i.e. incorporating anybody who is already a national citizen in any of the member states, and excluding anybody, however permanently settled and economically or culturally integrated, who comes from extracommunitarian spaces, produces something like a European apartheid, a reverse side of the emerging European community of citizens.[30]

It is this same 'apartheid', or at the very least a consuming process of othering and bordering, which is more subtly uncovered in the works studied within contemporary urban space. Both within the home and in public space, this thesis demonstrates the ways in which entry into and enjoyment of urban space is limited or complicated for recent migrant arrivals.

In certain ways, as Balibar has shown elsewhere, the construction of borders marks both Europe's understanding of its own identity and its historic behaviour elsewhere. Balibar describes the historical project of "drawing" political borders across Europe, and by extension across the world with Europe framed as a global centre, as a means to "organize the world's exploitation and to export the "border form" to the periphery, in an attempt to transform the whole universe into an extension of Europe, later into 'another Europe', built on the same political model", a method which historically served the ends of colonisation but went on to support contemporary global hierarchies under a western-centric model.[31]

> This process continued until decolonization and thus also until the construction of the current international order. But one could say that in a

[30] Etienne Balibar, "At the Borders of Citizenship: A Democracy in Translation?," *European Journal of Social Theory* 13, no. 3 (August 2010): 319, https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431010371751.
[31] Etienne Balibar and Erin M. Williams, "World Borders, Political Borders," *PMLA* 117, no. 1, (2002): 75.

> certain sense it was never completely achieved; that is, the formation of independent, sovereign, unified, or homogeneous nation-states at the same time failed in a very large part of the world, or it was thrown into question, not only outside Europe but in certain parts of Europe itself.[32]

This analysis of the European project to score the world across with borders, and the problems and injustices which have marked the project since its original conception, also help to reveal a key theme of this thesis, one which is investigated in depth in Chapter 5: the multidirectional historical bases of contemporary migration, and the postcolonial aspects of each journey of migration described. Even those journeys which do not directly map out a former colonial relationship hold strong connections to former colonies and the long hard, continuing road of decolonisation. On a simpler level, this project's understanding of migration is strongly influenced by Ambalavaner Sivanandan's much-cited aphorism "I am here because you were there".[33]

Bearing this in mind, the claim of this thesis to carry out 'mapping', as well as referencing the ways in which it traces individual stories through physical space, can be politically justified in the context of a decolonising action. As Sandro Mezzadra observes,

> It is important to remember that mapping was a key tool of colonial domination. The tensions and clashes between cartographic tools constructed on the model of the sovereign state with its firm boundaries and specific ''indigenous'' geographies gave rise to wars and shaped the ''geo-bodies'' of postcolonial states.[34]

As such, this thesis attempts to highlight (and, politically, support) projects of counter-mapping which occur in the novels. As the characters enter the unknown, occupy the former colonial centre, or struggle to find themselves in a place where they are the 'other',

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[32] ibid, 75.
[33] Gary Younge, "Ambalavaner Sivanandan Obituary," *The Guardian*, February 7, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/07/ambalavaner-sivanandan.
[34] Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor* (Duke University Press Books, 2013), 31.

their journeys can be read as resistance through travel. Other strategies of resistance are also considered: 'the various ways in which the "urban poor" have dealt with their socioeconomic circumstances. Not only coping mechanisms, but open[ing] up [the] possibility for existence and visibility.'[35] Throughout the thesis, small acts of resistance - both on an individual level and as part of wider movements - are brought into the light, and this project attempts to foreground migrant perspectives rather than reading them as aberrations: this itself it conceptualises as a political act. However it is not a philanthropic one. Europe's struggle with its own identity, which at the moment of writing (Summer 2019) is at its worst point since World War Two, can only be resolved if it is able to come to terms with perceived difference in its midst, to understand its new diversities and changing populations not as a challenge but as a dividend. 'This is what I call the difficulty – or the cosmopolitical difficulty – for Europe to deal with its double otherness, or its internal otherness and its external otherness, which now are no longer confronted in absolutely separated spaces'.[36]

One of the main justifications of this project is the tensions in discourse on migration and the rights associated with it, particularly at the scale of the state and national media. In Italy and the UK, right-wing governments with anti-immigration agendas have come to power since this project began in 2015. In France, the new populist centre-right leader came to power in an election marked by discussion of how France should react to new migration flows. Conversely, in cities across the world - from the 'Sanctuary Cities' across the USA,[37] to

[35] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (Yale University Press, 1990).
[36] Balibar, "At the Borders of Citizenship," 321.
[37] Tim Henderson, "Cities, States Resist — and Assist — Immigration Crackdown in New Ways," *PEW*, August 3, 2018, https://pew.org/2O8sa9I.

London mayor Sadiq Khan's message to EU residents that 'London is Open',[38] to local networks of residents in Paris and Rome providing basic solidarity and aid to destitute migrants,[39] there is evidence both that major cities *as a whole* tend to identify as more liberal or progressive, as more welcoming to strangers and accepting of difference, transience and population movement, than the nation states in which they are located. All three of the cities studied boast a mayor who, while migration policy is mostly determined at state level, employs a rhetoric of welcome, celebrates diversity, and emphasises the progressive nature of the city (with the implication that less diverse, less urban areas are not as progressive). In Paris, socialist mayor Anne Hidalgo commented on the high numbers of street homeless refugees and migrants: 'I do not understand why the state allows indignity and chaos to flourish at the gates of the capital of France.'[40] Similarly, Virginia Raggi, the M5S mayor of Rome since 2016, states 'From Rome, the city which bases its identity and its wealth in the welcome it offers, we bring a message in favour of integration and social inclusion, and above all for those who are far from their own places of origin'.[41] Like Khan, these politicians are producing rhetoric (if not action) in marked contradiction to national political discourse, even from their own parties.

[38] United Kingdom. London Mayoral Office. "London Is Open," London City Hall, July 18, 2016, https://www.london.gov.uk//what-we-do/arts-and-culture/london-open.
[39] Frances Grahl, "At the Crossroads: Homeless and Undocumented People in Paris since the Calais Evictions," *OpenDemocracy*, March 20, 2017, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/mediterranean-journeys-in-hope/at-crossroads-homeless-and-undocumented-people-in-paris/.
[40] L'Express and AFP, "Campements de migrants : Anne Hidalgo appelle l'État à un 'plan d'urgence,'" *L'Express*, March 27, 2019, https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/campements-de-migrants-anne-hidalgo-appelle-l-etat-a-un-plan-d-urgence_2069710.html.
[41] "Migranti: Raggi (sindaco Roma), 'la città trova la sua identità e la sua ricchezza nell'accoglienza' | AgenSIR," *AgenSIR - Servizio Informazione Religiosa* (blog), September 24, 2019, https://www.agensir.it/quotidiano/2019/9/24/migranti-raggi-sindaco-roma-la-citta-trova-la-sua-identita-e-la-sua-ricchezza-nellaccoglienza/.

But how to measure a wider discourse of migration within the scale of the capital city? This thesis uses a critical discourse analysis of migration fiction upon the assumption that migrant authors and authors of migrant background, through narratives of individual migrant experience, shed some light upon that dialectical interaction between the stranger and the host, the settled resident and the newcomer. To do so, it provides an overview of several dozen novels about migration to London, Paris and Rome, focusing on four key areas of existing as a migrant body within urban space; public space, encounters, domestic space and the imagined city. Each of the four chapters provides a close reading of either two or three novels, widening the discussion into some generalisations about the field as a whole, and concluding by suggesting how its findings reflect on that tripartite relationship between the city, the migrant individual, and the novel.

The three cities have been chosen to provide a broad comparative approach, which offers the opportunity for some, limited generalisation across the findings, and suggests a portrait of writing on the subject within contemporary Europe. The study attempts to minimise a focus on the three nation states, following the logic that after arrival, the experience of a migrant is very different depending on where s/he settles, and, arguably, the three European capital cities offer a more similar experience to a migrant than the countries more widely. However, it is worth noting than certain well-publicised and dangerous land and sea routes to Europe, which have become more common over the last couple of decades since the introduction of much stricter border controls in the EU and the UK, often mean a person crosses all three countries before arriving at his/her imagined destination.

Chapters

This introduction to the field of study is followed by a Literature Review which sets out some background to the literary fields studied. After this, the thesis is organised as outlined below, and divided broadly into four major aspects of the urban environment: outside spaces, contact and conflict, inside spaces and the conceptual or imagined city.

The first chapter deals with public space from the moment of arrival in the city to the construction of ownership for the migrant subject. It considers urban public space in this era of *Occupy*, of rhetoric about 'no-go zones', and considers the major European city in relation to the nation state as a complex network of contested and multi-use public spaces. Taking two recent novels as its main case studies, it follows the protagonists and the narratives through expectations, arrival and settling in, to explore how the migrant experience is represented by and connected to the squares, streets and other public spaces of the city.

The two novels discussed reflect these concerns but also offer alternative viewpoints and novelistic strategies which complicate a description of arrival. In Itoua-Ndinga's *Le Roman des Immigrés* (*The Novel of the Immigrants*) the protagonist is not a 'migrant' as such, but an apparently objective reporter chronicling the stories of migrants in Paris from an external perspective, and describing migrant Paris in a style which owes much to travel writing.[42] As he tells the stories of other arrivals, he builds up a composite, multi-perspective image of the city as it is lived by immigrants from all over the world, investigating and describing a Paris which is limited to certain places. *Il comandante del fiume* (*The Commander of the*

[42] Itoua-Ndinga, *Le roman des immigrés: Deuxième édition revue et corrigée*, 2e édition revue et corrigée (Editions L'Harmattan, 2015).

River), conversely, describes many different Romes, each one experienced by the teenaged protagonist, and each living in uneasy conflict with the other.[43] An action-packed *Bildungsroman*, *Il comandante del fiume* sets up a unique comparison between 'Somali Rome' and 'Somali London' through the eyes of its Somali-Italian teenaged protagonist.

The chapter touches on how historical events, the international 'image' of the city and famous landmarks are described in comparison with migrant centres, investigating how urban exterior spaces are owned, contested, accessed and imbued with different power structures. It explores what 'ownership' means in the case of a newcomer to the city, and looks at how ownership is enforced and contested within city development. It touches upon the centre versus periphery dichotomy within the three major cities, looking at how the novels present town centres, *banlieues* and outskirts, and setting up comparisons with other nations as well as with rural environments. It is structured into three moments in time and place; firstly the first arrival and the corresponding, complex viewpoint on the city, secondly the ways in which a migrant might come to feel ownership over where s/he lives; and finally the alternative sites, such as other cities, community-owned spaces, and green places or 'nature' from which a migrant can (attempt to) escape the confines and regulations which govern public space. No space is 'neutral': this chapter seeks to explore imaginative alternatives to existing power structures.

In a similar theme, the second chapter looks at encounters between migrant, and particularly on public transport which it identifies as a unique category of public space: both

[43] Farah Cristina Ali, *Il comandante del fiume* (66th and 2nd, 2014).

policed and liberating, moving yet fixed. It looks at journeys made on public transport across the city, contending that these journeys both reflect and normalise the longer journeys of migration. Moreover, public transport offers a stage for different kinds of covert and overt observation and encounters between very different people, acting as a platform for liberating meetings and mutual recognition between migrants in the city.

These novelistic encounters on public transport take place against a background of mundanity, showing the quotidian pattern of journeys by bus, train or underground and constructing a tension between the commonplace and the extraordinary, a tension which takes in conflict, marginalisation and struggle. However, there are other ways to understand the European city. For the individual, a new map develops, one of uncharted, dangerous areas and well-trodden daily routes; of local knowledges, support networks, and social exclusion.

This chapter charts different kinds of encounters in public space within recent fiction about the migrant experience in Paris and London, looking at inclusivity, ownership, use and exclusion for migrants in different kinds of public space. Using a relational understanding of space, the second chapter maps the ways in which urban novels of migration understand, negotiate and challenge the geography of the city, concluding with how they undermine dominant narratives of the (European) city as centre, and re-map the migrant journey as an ambiguous, continuing movement rather than a centripetal pull.

The third chapter will take interior spaces as its main focus, looking at temporary and permanent homes and interactions within these. It will also question representations of

ethnic and religious groups and the family unit as unified or homogenous, showing how tensions about gender, age and life choices can be played out behind closed doors, and arguing, influenced by recent feminist theory, that the idea of an absolute boundary between internal and external space is at best dated, at worst a misogynist trope.

In post-war migration fiction, the home and domestic spaces are often associated with poverty and precarity. A wide range of fictional works in French and English look at housing difficulties under the 'colour bar' of the 1950s and 60s, while later, 'second generation' writers would react against what they saw as closed, traditional migrant homes, bound by religious and family ties. James Procter's *Dwelling Places* looks back at the pride and protection offered by even the shabbiest dwelling in the 1950s, a time when black migrants struggled to find lodgings.

> Paradoxically, the bleak housing conditions facing black settlers in this period only *increases* emotional investment in the dwelling place according to Selvon. Within the wider, less tenable landscape of the London he portrays here, the home represents a vital locus of 'return' and 'retirement'.[44]

Now other barriers to secure housing have replaced the colour bar in the three cities, yet this paradox, of building a secure and comfortable home even in the most temporary and uncomfortable dwelling, remains an important trope within fiction of migration. However, in recent novels of migration, new domestic arrangements are being modelled which simultaneously combat impressions of a perceived traditional, quiet migrant family home, and extend bonds of solidarity far beyond the home.

[44] James Procter, *Dwelling Places: Postwar Black British Writing* (Manchester University Press, 2003), 61.

Two interesting examples look at women's paid work inside the home in Paris and London. In *Minaret* by Leila Aboulela the protagonist, a Sudanese migrant who has fallen upon hard times, works as a domestic servant for a wealthy Egyptian family in London.[45] Meanwhile in *Un pays pour mourir* (*A Country to Die In*) by Abdellah Taïa, a Moroccan sex-worker cares for an Iranian refugee she finds in the street.[46] Both novels examine the hardship and precarity of the domestic space for female migrant workers, yet challenge the idea of migrant domestic space as traditional and separate to the mainstream societies of Paris and London, crossing the conceptual border between 'home' and the 'outside world'. This chapter examines the new formulations of family that the two works offer, and discuss the liberational potentials that such re-imaginings could hold. While both narratives are marked by material concerns and contingency, they permit new ways of living in the city to be imagined.

In keeping with this chapter's stated aim, to question the boundaries between the family domestic unit and the world outside, the third case study, fittingly, is not a single-occupancy home but a larger community across an entire apartment block in Rome, and in this case the relationships between the different occupants and how they negotiate alterity are examined in detail. In Amara Lakhous' *Scontro di civilta per un ascensore a Piazza Vittorio* (*Clash of Civilisations Over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio*) a large and varied group of residents, many of them migrants, testify to their living situation and gradually paint a picture of life in a tenement building in a busy migrant area of Rome.[47]

[45] Leila Aboulela, *Minaret*, New edition (Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2006).
[46] Abdellah Taïa, *Un pays pour mourir* (Paris: Points, 2015).
[47] Amara Lakhous, *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a Piazza Vittorio* (Tascabili E/O, 2006).

The fourth and final chapter of this project takes a different approach to constructing a portrait of the migrant city, looking at how place is constructed, imagined and experienced in novels of migration, with a focus on the blurred and shifting boundaries between the place of origin and the place of arrival, and attempting to reconceptualise migration as an experience which doesn't necessarily end once the central figure is settled in a new city.

To this end, the chapter compares physical and imagined geography, as well as reflections on writing *in* and *against* an imagined centre. It suggests that both place and time are conflated, re-imagined and complicated within its case studies, with the effect of questioning simple accounts of migration as a one way journey from A to B. To do so, it brings together three highly intertextual novels with a focus on mapping the city. *La Seine était rouge* (*The Seine Was Red*) by Leila Sebbar describes a contemporary journey of historical discovery by three young people of French and Algerian origin, following them as they attempt first to reconstruct and then commemorate a violent episode in Parisian history.[48] *La mia casa è dove sono* (*My Home is Where I Am*) by Igiaba Scego follows a Somali protagonist as she tries to map what Rome means to her, interlayering her creation with palimpsestic maps of Mogadishu and elsewhere. [49] And finally *The Silent Minaret* by Ishtiyaq Shukri, set in the uneasy London post 9/11 and pre-Iraq War, brings together shameful episodes of colonial violence, the struggle for statehood and the erasures of history through the mapping project of the missing protagonist. [50] Chapter four also

[48] Leïla Sebbar, *La Seine Etait Rouge* (Montréal: Actes Sud, 1999).
[49] Igiaba Scego, *La mia casa è dove sono* (Loescher Coedizioni, 2012).
[50] Ishtiyaq Shukri, *The Silent Minaret*, (Jacana Media, 2006).

considers imagined and written constructions of the 'homeland' or sending country (cf. Rushdie) and how the destination city is made to function as a reflection of other, imagined places. These considerations impact upon narratives of belonging, of dual or multiple identity and act as a challenge to unified presentations of either the sending or the receiving place. To write the European city is also to write other places: to write belonging is to write danger and loss; in the chapter the transformative potential of the big, anonymous city is realised. The city is an object of desire, a dead end, a stopover and a blank space in this final, more generalised imagining.

The conclusions to this thesis offer some answers to the research questions outlined above, suggest routes for further research, and bring together the different areas of study (exterior and interior spaces, institutions, imagined cities) to offer a broad view of the relationship between novels of migration and the European city.

Positionality

This project was originally engendered from work carried out during an MA in 'Comparative Literature- African and Asian' at SOAS, University of London, and follows on in many ways from my MA dissertation, "Migration, Fiction and Redemption: coming to London in Peter Akinti's *Forest Gate* and Brian Chikwava's *Harare North*".[51] This dissertation was the start of my interest in migration fiction, and an ongoing fascination with marginalised or alternative literatures written in European languages, their position within a postcolonial canon, and the ambiguous relationship they have with the so-called literary canon and the history of

[51] Frances Grahl, "Migration, Fiction and Redemption: Coming to London in Peter Akinti's Forest Gate and Brian Chikwava's Harare North" (2012), http://shareorshelve.blogspot.com/p/blog-page.html.

literary analysis. My former studies had a strong focus on great works within French and English literary history: the postcolonial works I studied were those of Africa and Asia, rather than the authors in Europe writing in and against the local literary tradition. While limited, the MA dissertation freed me to look carefully at multiple elements of the contemporary novel, investigating its contribution to wider discourses and reconsidering the relationship between literary strategy and realist descriptive writing without, I hope, mining it for its perceived contributions to social sciences or humanities.

I have tried to remain aware of the subjectivity of the research I have undertaken, considering the importance of these novels and their messages about lived experience of migrations. My class background and my citizenship status are privileges which, it is essential to note, helped to put me in a position to mediate this work. That my findings are accepted and believed is of course partly down to my hard work, but it also reflects the position I was born into by pure chance. Conversely, errors of representation or omissions are my responsibility and mine alone.

On the other hand, I'm pleased to say I have something in common with, for example, Peter Akinti, author of *Forest Gate*. Like Akinti, I was born in, and attended local state schools in Forest Gate, Newham, East London. Like his parents, my parents were 'not from round here', although his, coming from Nigeria, were seen as migrants: my own, from Scotland and Wales, were much more often permitted to present themselves as 'belonging' in East London. It is crucial to mention the differences between our experiences: I was the child of a teacher and a university professor, my parents among the wealthier in the neighbourhood,

and I was seen as and identified as white. Akinti writes of the biographical inspiration for *Forest Gate*.

> I grew up in the East End of London, in an area called Forest Gate, where you could get your ass kicked if you didn't learn fast to keep your mouth shut and your eyes constantly averted. My best friend, Alex, and I spent our free time hanging around, robbing bus conductors, breaking windows, stealing cars and challenging people to fight at the flimsiest whim.[52]

But at the start of this research journey when I read *Forest Gate*, many of James' and Meina's experiences were familiar to me. The casual police brutality to young black men (if anything this was increased in my presence, as a way to taunt and diminish black boys in front of their white girlfriends), the seemingly silly hierarchies in the playground between religions, ethnicities and languages, which occasionally erupted into violence: the ways in which school and church and social services could have an equalising or a humiliating, divisive effect: the randomness with which those dice could fall. This lived experience of Peter Akinti and countless others, in London, in Paris and in Rome, I later found, is ignored, unknown or exoticised by many. At university in London just a couple of miles away, the fear and ignorance exhibited towards what I here call the 'migrant city' came as a shock to me. I learnt that across Britain (and later when I lived in Italy and France my experience was not belied) a conceptual ghettoization, a casual othering of certain parts of the city, prevails, which in my personal experience cannot be overstated.

This notwithstanding, the work of sharing the experiences of Black people and people of colour in the UK and across Europe is being carried out by a new wave of prominent young writers of colour, and the debates they are igniting offer much hope after years of growing racism and xenophobia. Rapper, writer and polymath Akala, like myself and Akinti, went to

[52] Peter Akinti, *Forest Gate* (Vintage Digital, 2009), 187.

school in inner-city London, and in his recent memoir *Natives: Race and Class in the Ruins of Empire*, he brilliantly dissects London's diversity and its racism through the lens of his own experiences.

> I went to school with the children of lords and ladies, millionaires, refugees, children clearly suffering from malnourishment and young boys selling drugs for their fathers. If there is anywhere in Britain that could serve as a petri dish for examining race, class and culture, Camden would be that place.[53]

Akala widens his own complex experiences to demonstrate the subtlety and ubiquity of race- and class-based oppressions in the UK and the manner in which they permeate British identity, institutions and media. With deft humour he also challenges a victimising or reductive view on those who experience these oppressions, and charts improvements in certain areas while insisting that Britain's recent history of systematic violence against migrants and people of colour, and the ways in which this impacts lives, is not forgotten.

> The purpose of this book is to examine how these seemingly impersonal forces - race and class - have impacted and continue to shape our lives, and how very easily I could now be telling you a very different but much more common story of cyclical violence, prison and part-time, insecure and low-paying work.[54]

Other notable names in this explosion of writing include Reni Eddo-Lodge's *Why I'm No Longer Talking To White People About Race*, David Olusoga's historical works such as *Black and British*, and the unforgettable collection of essays edited by Nikesh Shukla, *The Good Immigrant*.[55] Black, British poet Benjamin Zephaniah (another former resident of Forest Gate) shows in his recent autobiography how during his lifetime, he has seen a growth in

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[53] Akala, *Natives: Race and Class in the Ruins of Empire* (Hachette UK, 2018), 1.
[54] Akala, 14.
[55] Reni Eddo-Lodge, *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People about Race* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018); David Olusoga, *Black and British: A Forgotten History* (Pan Macmillan, 2016), Nikesh Shukla; *The Good Immigrant* (Unbound Publishing, 2016).

the potential for black authors to have their voice heard, and to earn a living from their work. The political aim of this thesis is not to speak for people of colour or migrants but to play a part in amplifying their voices, and to help uncover that which has been hidden. Zephaniah, like Akala, sees improvements but also new dangers.

> I wanted to see a time when lots of performance poets would be able to secure a living from their craft, and that too has happened. The scene is alive and well and all over Britain. In fact, all over the world talented people are earning a living from their craft, and more importantly millions of people are enjoying it.
>
> But I'm not sitting back and relaxing. Not in times like these when the extreme right is on the rise all over Europe, when black people are still five times more likely to be stopped and searched than their white counterparts.[56]

While this thesis remains a literary study, and very little citeable information has been included from the author's practical experience of working with migrants and refugees, it is impossible to overestimate the impact that migrant solidarity activism across Europe has had on the final document. My work in Calais alone has forced me on multiple occasions to question what I thought I knew about the lived experience of travelling from Africa or Asia, of entering Fortress Europe, and of transience through the very same major capital cities that this study researches. In Paris, Rome and Athens, I had long discussions with migrants and refugee attempting both to exist within and to rebuild the European city, and recognised the key theses of this project within those discussions.

The literary investigation that follows shows how experience of migration is subjective and individualised. However, certain key material factors tend to construct a shared experience

[56] Benjamin Zephaniah, *The Life and Rhymes of Benjamin Zephaniah: The Autobiography* (Simon and Schuster, 2018), 332.

between different people making similar journeys. These include class, ethnicity, cultural traditions and religious customs, gender, education, language and cultural capital play a significant part. My work with refugees and migrants, however, indicates two very important factors which will be seriously considered in the work that follows. Firstly, money and economic freedom seem to me often to carry greater weight than the factors listed above, and this thesis will return as often as is necessary to these material concerns.

Secondly, there is certainly a randomness to migration stories which means that one cannot speak for all. This is strikingly conveyed in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's recent novel *Americanah*, in the story of Obinze, who, despite his education and his hard work, 'fails' in his migratory trajectory while others around him from similar backgrounds 'succeed'. Excluded, working in low-status jobs with a borrowed NI card, and living in poverty, Obinze bumps into a school friend and witnesses the casual luxury and security of his home life, his British friends both Black and white, and the time they are able to devote to discussion of arts, culture, political discussion and international travel. 'His eyes would follow them, with a lost longing, and he would think: *you can work, you are visible, and you don't even know how fortunate you are.*'[57] Within draconian immigration regimes and societies rife with class and racialised inequalities, the *random* must also play a part.

Migrants are called upon to perform story-telling, to narrate their own lives and journeys, time and again during contemporary migratory experience. This story-telling, within legal institutions, to deflect conflict and to justify one's own presence where one is perceived as

[57] Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah* (Fourth Estate, 2014), 227. [emphasis in text]

different, makes for a poignant crossover between lived experience and the literature of migration studied here. Among the many hundreds of migrants and refugees I encountered over the last five years was a young Sudanese asylum seeker of nineteen. Tom (a nickname given to him by his mother) explained the difficulties he had experienced crossing the Sahara, in Libya and on a boat in the Mediterranean. With humour he explained how he and other boys had escaped from a camp in the south of Italy and walked to Rome, stealing melons and figs to eat. Tom has knowledge of migrant Rome, migrant Paris and migrant London with which this document cannot compete, and his journey from Darfur took the same length of time as this doctoral research project. As Tom said to me, 'As soon as I learn English, I am going to tell the world my story.'[58]

[58] "Tom", Last name withheld, Informal discussion, February 8, 2019.

Literature review

This Literature Review looks at the literary criticism and analysis already available on the subject of migrant literature in Paris, London and Rome, from the end of their colonial eras to the present day. It aims to compare the most useful elements of extant research in order to contextualise the research questions, to discover understudied areas and provide a context around the subject. However due to significant differences between the three fields, the three sections will not follow a specific comparison grid, rather seeking to provide some general comparative observations in the conclusions.

The novels surveyed in this project can all be situated within the wider genre of contemporary popular fiction: the kind of relatively inexpensive novels a reader might pick up in any bookshop. Not guaranteed a favourable critical reception, these texts and their publication are of necessity guided by economic factors which select some and reject others. Nonetheless, they cannot be used as simply sociological or anthropological sources, always a danger for modern postcolonial literature in a Western market. As this thesis will demonstrate, many of these texts use highly literary language and/or experimental techniques, and hold complex relationships with various literary heritages, both European and non-European, which reflect the author's background or origins, the country of writing and the projected audience. Readership is thus particularly relevant to this project, not least because it intends to look at how novels potentially shape and change a more general collective imagining of migration, one which might support or challenge hegemonic representations. And within a postcolonial scope it is most interesting because it might include very different, even opposed groups of people.

> Most critical analyses of postcolonial writing implicitly or explicitly presume that the reader is either a member of the writer's nation, as in Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, or, more frequently, a generalized cosmopolitan Westerner.[1]

Innes' comment on the limitations within analyses of postcolonial writing becomes more complicated when applied to literature of and about migration to Europe. Now the definition 'member of a[ny] nation' becomes problematic; we must question this emphasis placed on the writer's identity as well as the reader's, arguing that meaning about identity, national or personal, should be found in the text. Moreover both writers and texts within this field often elide easy categorisation.

This project uses comparative methods but embraces a broadly postcolonial theoretical perspective, for the reasons elaborated above: in brief, postcoloniality informs the three cultures in very different ways, due in part to their different colonial pasts, but also to more recent history: participation in Europe and the EU; the development of border policies; attitudes towards migration and ethnic diversity within politics, the media, and the public more broadly. An interesting focus for comparison is the intersection between literature and ethnic identity and how it is addressed in the three fields. Postcolonial theory has always explicitly promoted the radical potential of literature and looks at different modes of resistance through culture, a major focus of this project, and it will look at certain recent developments in the field; postcolonial literary geography, studies of migration in the postcolonial context, and new trends in postcolonial research on the city. Finally a short section is devoted to alternative approaches to the geographic sites under examination: the

[1] C. L. Innes, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 200.

potential of using alternative spaces inspired by Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*, and the way in which a city can function outside of and even as a challenge to national and nationalist discourses.[2]

Over the next few pages follows an introduction to recent critical postcolonial contexts in the UK, France and Italy, which aims to review the work already being carried out in the field of migrant literature in the three areas, to establish parallels and shared perspectives within which to contextualise my own comparative study, and finally to attempt a few theoretical and concrete definitions for key terms and concepts within the project.

'London is the Place for Me'[3]

Black British Writing[4]

> 'Almost every author whose roots lie in the former colonies has produced work, fictional or non-fictional, focusing on life in the English metropolis.'[5]

Over the last half-century London has been a hub of writing by migrants and about migration. Broad surveys such as Sukhdev Sandhu's *London Calling* and James Procter's *Writing Black Britain* position migrant literature within a British Black and minority ethnic literary heritage, while works such as Susheila Nasta's *Home Truths* and Elleke Boehmer's *Indian Arrivals* emphasize the long-standing presence of people from around the world,

[2] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic - Modernity and Double Consciousness*, (London: Verso, 1993).
[3] Lord Kitchener, *London Is the Place for Me*, 1950.
[4] 'Black' and 'black writing': for a note on choices of words, issues of translation and the definitions used throughout, see **Appendix 2: Definitions.**
[5] Sukhdev Sandhu, *London Calling: How Black and Asian Writers Imagined a City* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004) xxiv.

arguing against literatures laced within the nation state and for a 'cross-border poetics'.[6] Sandhu reasons that this heritage is older than the beginning of large-scale migration from Commonwealth countries, observing that there was a significant black population in London from Elizabethan times and beginning his own book with slave and servant accounts from the 18th century. However migrant fiction in the capital is generally associated with 'London's postwar transformation'; the arrival of the Empire Windrush in 1948, following which a new generation of writers from the Caribbean such as Sam Selvon and George Lamming wrote novels which described the shock and hardship of arriving in London as well as the swift development of migrant communities. [7]

Black British writing over the next five decades was informed by the development of large communities in London and the UK from other ex-colonies and commonwealth countries, the different forms of racism and oppression suffered by Britain's newcomers, the race riots of Thatcher's 1980s, and London's new status as a global city with residents from every part of the world. While some migrations are associated with a particular part of the UK such as the northern industrial cities, and others are more equally distributed across the country (for example, EU internal migration from Poland since 2004), it is clear that London lives up to its reputation as a global city both historically and in the present day.[8] 'The UK's migrant

[6] Sandhu; Procter, *Dwelling Places*; Elleke Boehmer, *Indian Arrivals, 1870-1915: Networks of British Empire* (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2015), 14; Susheila Nasta, *Home Truths: Fictions of the South Asian Diaspora in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

[7] John McLeod, *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis*, (Routledge, 2004), 23; Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (Penguin Classics, 2006); George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (University of Michigan Press, 1960).

[8] McLeod, John "Caryl Phillips and the English North" in Andrew Teverson and Sara Upstone, eds., *Postcolonial Spaces: The Politics of Place in Contemporary Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Marek Okólski and John Salt, "Polish Emigration to the UK after 2004; Why Did so Many Come?," *Central and Eastern European Migration Review* 3, no. 2 (2014): 11–37.

In the 2011 census, 4.91 million London residents (almost 60%) self-identified as white, while 3.31 (just over 40%) identified as BAME (defined as the sum of all other ethnic groups). The same survey, released in 2014 by

population is concentrated in London,' with EU and non-EU foreign nationals making up 12.1 and 11% of London's population respectively. [9] Foreign-born residents including British citizens make up 36.5% of the capital's population but only 13.8% across the UK.[10]

> 'Postcolonial London' may be considered a conceptual stratagem intended to foreground the consequences of metropolitan restructuring as they have been represented by writers who have arrived from, or who have ancestral links with, countries with a history of colonialism.[11]

There is not space here for a more complete review, but while leaving an indelible mark on the wider British literary scene, these very varied authors can also be linked by their tendency to adopt complex positions 'as in-between or insider/ outsider[s]' within British society.[12]

Not merely a global city, London is undeniably a postcolonial one, a world centre for migration, for literature and, importantly, for dissent: '[its] very role as the metropolitan heart of empire also ensured it would become the heart of resistance to empire.'[13] John McLeod divides his study *Postcolonial London* into five chapters in roughly chronological order, charting the city within sections ordered by the type of text; national identity and the political relations within London at that time, and covering, approximately, the timescale described above.[14] McLeod focuses on the geography of the city and the creation of

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London Data Set, estimates trends in migration. It is difficult to establish a comparison between the three cities as France, Italy and the UK all measure ethnicity, nationality and 'racial' identity differently. (http://data.london.gov.uk/demography/ethnic-group-population-projections/ (Accessed 04.05.2016)).

[9] Of London's population, 25.5% of foreign-born people were born outside the EU and 11% within it. Oliver Hawkins, "Migration Statistics," *SN06077*, 2012, http://mercury.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/179777/ipublicationdocument_singledocument/75c0ecb1-5438-4666-80fe-3ed40933b74e/en/SN06077.pdf.

[10] Hawkins.

[11] John McLeod, *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis*, (Routledge, 2004).

[12] Innes, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English*, 188.

[13] C. L. Innes, *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain, 1700-2000* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 167.

[14] McLeod, *Postcolonial London*.

identity, using forms of remapping to look at how new places are created in literature, and how these places can challenge mainstream representations. Thus London becomes a site of potential resistance as it is written and rewritten, and as McLeod explains, the imagined city repeatedly functions to present, represent and remodel the physical one:

> [Postcolonial London] admits the facticity of London's colonial and diaspora histories to the study of cultural production, and also recognises that the experience and understanding of the city cannot free itself from imaginative and discursive modes.'[15]

Nonetheless McLeod's work could be accused of a certain optimism regarding resistance through texts; the erstwhile centre of empire is not always the ideal ground for effecting change, either through discursive or other means. The final chapter compares 'millennial' texts which offer a message of hope through the hybridity of the world they depict and the multiplicity of their narrative strands. McLeod focuses on metaphoric fields around water which connect the Thames to other parts of the world, and the different functions this imagery can carry out. However it is noticeable that these later texts often do not describe London as a whole at all; many are set in one area from which there is little mobility. The centre of the city becomes invisible or irrelevant in a marked shift from a margins/centre cityscape.

The thematic overlap between *Postcolonial London* and John Clement Ball's *Imagining London: Postcolonial Fiction and the Transnational Metropolis* is counterbalanced by the different approaches employed by the two authors.[16] Ball divides London using two geographical axes; plotting the different districts of London onto (roughly) the area of origin

[15] McLeod, 15.
[16] John Clement Ball, *Imagining London: Postcolonial Fiction and the Transnational Metropolis* (University of Toronto Press, 2006); McLeod, *Postcolonial London*.

of the writers, 'to playfully reinforce the global/ local multi-dimensionality of these migrants' Londons and cultural identities.'[17] By so doing he avoids the problems of a purely chronological approach and arguably theorises imagined and literary space more thoroughly and convincingly than McLeod. Firstly, this choice of structure is an implicit acknowledgement of the potential to hold multiple identities, and that travelling or migrating does not erase previous national or local affiliations. Secondly, it reflects the way that London itself is organised: not as a whole, but (and particularly for its marginalised residents) as segments of an orange; stations on a map; villages or ghettoes, and in general as a whole spectrum of complex geographical groupings whose access and interconnectedness is not equal for everyone.

We can see this fluidity of place as a (limited) response to the Eurocentrism risked by a project of this kind: Ball consciously avoids placing too much on the centres, either of the former British empire or the city, instead concentrating on the imaginative potential of the text:

> As ex-colonials come to dwell in London and walk its streets, they appropriate it and reterritorialize it. As writers render those experiences into autobiographical or fictional narratives, they reinscribe the metropolis against their backgrounds and identities as formerly colonized subjects. The London that once imposed its power and self-constructions on them can now by reinvented *by* them.[18]

Ball's book also includes white writers, writers from the Commonwealth and texts in which migration to London is not permanent. He elides a postcolonial viewpoint into a transnational one, and this presents scholars working now with some serious theoretical

[17] Ball, *Imagining London*, 39.
[18] Ball, *Imagining London*. 9.

questions – can we relegate the importance of postcolonialism in a city such as London? Is transnationalism adequately criticised as unequally distributed?

Other Migrant Fictions

One further strand of literary history requires investigation: if we look at London by area, there are other groups of texts about migration outside of a focus on 'Black London': texts which look at other migrant groups in London. For example, Samuel Beckett's novel *Murphy* is the story of Irishmen in London, one which emphasises a sense of dislocation, the oppressive hierarchisation of a familiar yet alien society and constructions of 'foreign-ness'.[19] Like the Caribbean writers of the 50s and 60s, Beckett evokes an alternative London of seedy boarding-houses and depressed pubs. Later, in the 1960s, writers such as Edna O'Brien would juxtapose London as a destination of desire against rural Ireland, mirroring the sexism suffered by her female protagonists in rural Ireland and finally in 'Swinging' London.[20] Around the same time William Trevor's novel *The Boarding House* is notable for portraying Nigerian, West Indian and Irish migrants in one setting, bringing together, as C.L. Innes says, 'those who are lonely and alienated'. [21]

A useful comparison can similarly be made with novels about Jewish migration to London. In the introduction to his 1972 novel, *Journey Through A Small Planet*, Emanuel Litvinoff compares the Jewish East End of his childhood in the 1930s, with the new Muslim

[19] Samuel Beckett, *Murphy*, (London: Faber & Faber, 2009).
[20] Edna O'Brien, *Girls in Their Married Bliss*, (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2013). 1964.
The term 'intersectionality' had not yet been coined but this work, like Lynn Reid Banks' *The L-Shaped Room* and some of Doris Lessing's first London novels, reveals a new preoccupation with contrasting tropes of alienation and oppression by 'race', class, gender and sexuality.
[21] William Trevor, *The Boarding House* (Penguin, 2014); Innes, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English*, 186.

communities living in the same areas: '…instead of the old Yiddish newspapers on the counters there were others printed in Urdu.'[22] Judith Kerr's trilogy, *Out of the Hitler Time*, recounts travelling, settling and becoming a Londoner for a Jewish family.[23] Both the Jewish migrants who came to London between the 1870s and the end of WWII and the Irish communities formed across a century of mass migration can thus be inserted into a history of migration to the metropolis in which some things vary: reasons for coming, economic and educational background, family and community and not least racialized or ethnic identity and perception by others, including racism.[24] Nonetheless certain similarities can be identified: the struggle to fit in, linguistic, material hardship, the longing for a home which no longer exists and its recreation as an impossible object of desire, new opportunities and experiences in the big city, and finally the eventual development of new hybrid, conflicting and complementary identities. As Salman Rushdie writes:

> Let me suggest that Indian writers in England have access to a second tradition… the culture and political history of the phenomenon of migration, displacement, life in a minority group. We can … claim as our ancestors the Huguenots, the Irish, the Jews…[25]

To focus on the migrant *within* London rather than determining his/her story through the places s/he has left allows us to see a 'migration novel' as a literary product of London rather than associating with the country of origin of either the author or the protagonist.

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[22] Emanuel Litvinoff and Patrick Wright, *Journey Through a Small Planet* (London: Penguin Classics, 2008), 10.
[23] Judith Kerr, *Out of the Hitler Time Trilogy: When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit, Bombs on Aunt Dainty, A Small Person Far Away* (Harper Collins, 2016).
[24] Of course, there had been Jewish migrant communities and Irish migrant communities for hundreds of years before this.
[25] Rushdie, Salman, Imaginary Homelands (Harmondsworth, Granta: 1991), 20.

A Place in London Literature: Multicultural Bestsellers

The last two decades have brought 'multicultural' London writers such as Zadie Smith and Monica Ali into the mainstream: described by Sebastian Groes as having had 'a major impact upon the contemporary British literary imagination, in which the capital city plays a central role.'[26] These two authors marked the beginning of a new wave of migrant fiction in the capital with two very different bestsellers: *White Teeth* and *Brick Lane*.[27] While it may represent the marginalised people within the city, there is no doubt that migrant fiction is now taken seriously as a key element of writing about London.

For example, *White Teeth*, a seminal novel which marks the start of a new era of migration fiction in UK writing, does not primarily reflect the author's ethnic origins or national identity. Instead it creates a complex and hybrid novelistic world populated by characters from diverse backgrounds. National, family, class and ethnic loyalties are secondary to the characters' shared ethical sensibilities, and their identification with Willesden. *Brick Lane*, which received a mixed reception including condemnation from East London's Bangladeshi community, presents the other side of hybrid, multicultural London in its depiction of ghettoization and oppression by ethnicity, class and gender.

Of the three cities under review, London is certainly the one which most strongly connected with multiculturalism, both as a practical project and as a politicised identification. Multiculturalism, presented as a solution from its inception,

[26] Sebastian Groes, *The Making of London: London in Contemporary Literature* (New York: Palgrave Scholastic, 2011), 221.
[27] Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*, (Penguin, 2001); Monica Ali, *Brick Lane*, (London: Black Swan, 2004).

> is premised on the idea that colonial cultures, aspirations and mentalities extended into and conditioned the life of this metropolis in the most intimate and comprehensive ways over long periods of time.[28]

However it is clear from both these seminal novels that the multicultural project has enjoyed only partial success: in *White Teeth* an ironic reflection on many-layered communities and in *Brick Lane* the stark representation of poverty, drugs and violence both implicitly criticise the failure to bring diverse communities together in a permanent or meaningful way. As Paul Gilroy warns, multiculturalism does not necessarily offer a straightforward solution.

> We may find that London's cosmopolitan post- cultures are more fragmented, fragile and unevenly developed formations than the stronger versions of the automatic multi-culture thesis would lead us to believe.[29]

So can Ball's transnational imagining of London and the multiculturalism embodied in these 'millennial' novels replace a postcolonial perspective on migrant London? In contemporary London, Black and minority ethnic Londoners can no longer be treated as 'immigrants': they are here to stay. And this is now reflected not just in London's incredible diversity and over 300 languages are spoken in London's schools, but in the new cultural and literary production of this millennium.[30]

However, multiculturalism has been partially eclipsed by new problems. Islamophobia has been on the rise since 2001, and this combined with the 2005 terrorists attacks in the capital has materially challenged political multiculturalism's flagship projects such as investment in religious centres. Since the EU's eastern expansions of 2004 and 2007, European migration

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[28] Paul Gilroy, Opening Address: "London: Post Colonial City", Institute of Visual Arts (INIVA) (http://www.iniva.org/celluloid/gilroy.html, accessed 03/12/2015)
[29] ibid.
[30] United Kingdom. Office for National Statistics, "2011 Census Data Catalogue" accessed September 30, 2019. https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011census/2011censusdata/2011censusdatacatalogue.

has been the focus of negative political and media campaigns. More recently the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis has attacked diversity in the form of cuts to ESOL and other support for immigrants, while the way in which migration is processed and administered has been constantly reviewed and ever-tighter controls introduced. Finally the 'Refugee Crisis', recognised as such from 2015 although its roots are older, is polarising Londoners. All these contribute to a more anxious climate in discussions of diverse London, and will affect literary representations of migration to this 'global' city.

Introduction to a Francophone Literary Heritage: Definitions and Defiance

There are sub-fields within migrant and diaspora literature and its study in the UK which can be mapped onto former British Empire 'regions'- namely the Indian subcontinent, the Caribbean and East and West Africa, but as we have seen, in recent years texts and criticism have moved towards a more hybrid, pluralistic approach to the idea of a 'postcolonial' text. In France, on the other hand, the question of origins retains importance across reviews of migrant literatures, often privileging an 'Arab' (North African) or West African point of view above other migrant texts, or categorising problem texts (by authors with different or less straightforward origins) outside of the French postcolonial field.

Paris, like London, has a long cosmopolitan history and has always been a destination of migration. Now, 40% of the foreign-born population of France live in the Île-de-France region, the larger metropolitan area which encompasses the much smaller city of Paris.[31]

[31] Île-de-France is the largest metropolitan area in Europe with a population of 10,516,110 (2011 census), while Paris has only around 2.9 million inhabitants.
Institut National de la Statistique, and et des Etudes Economiques. "Recensement de la population 2011," https://www.insee.fr/fr/metadonnees/source/serie/s1321 (Accessed 6th October 2021).

Within this area, 17.7% of the population were born in a different country, while a further 18% were born to at least one immigrant parent.[32] While significant proportions of both these groups have origins in North or West Africa, there are also high numbers of people with connections to other parts of the world: nearly a quarter of a million Parisians were born in Portugal and there are sizeable Chinese and Turkish communities. France does not officially collect statistics on movement from French territories and dominions (DOM-TOMS) to metropolitan France, yet around 150,000 Parisians give their place of birth as Guadeloupe or Martinique. In fact, the geography of the Île-de-France can be read as a remapping of the French empire, with power concentrated at the centre of the city while much of the outskirts are taken up by sprawling estates, social housing built partly to house new migrants from France's former colonies. Thus the metropolitan centre is both an object of desire and a provocative seat of power for those living in the margins of the city.

A History of Black Writing

Paris also had a long history as a hub for writers from around the world. From the 1920s to the 1950s African-American authors such as James Baldwin, Claude McKay and Richard Wright wrote about how the French capital could offer greater potential: for self-realisation, for transformation, for organisation; than the USA. The concept *Négritude,* used as a self-description by some writers of African origin from the 1930s onward, reflects the act of reclaiming a racialised identity which is one example of Black French and African writers' work to overcome and subvert ingrained French national and racial hierarchies.

[32] An 'immigrant', according to the French census, is a person who was born outside of French territory and without holding French nationality (even if now naturalised). France does not collect official data on people of colour who were born French and continue to hold French nationality.
Institut Paris-Region. http://www.iau-idf.fr/savoir-faire/nos-travaux/edition/les-descendants-dimmigres-vivant-en-ile-de-france.html (Accessed 3rd December 2015).

Bennetta Jules-Rosette starts her overview of *Black Paris* with the formation of the *Présence Africaine* collective and the opening of its bookshop near the Sorbonne. Jules-Rosette's work includes several interviews with Black Parisian writers from different generations, and focuses on how their intellectual and creative contributions challenged French imperial perspectives. *Présence Africaine* organised several conferences in different countries in the 1950s and 1960s. Rather than a unified political agenda, the *Présence Africaine* project brought together nationalists, pan-Africanists, political Muslims, French Marxists, African-American writers and intellectuals from the African diaspora, affirming the African intellectual's subjectivity and agency on a world stage. And it did so from Paris, symbolic centre of Western orientalist and socio-anthropological studies of the African *other*:

> Methodologically, I treat all of these sources as contributions to discourses about an imagined Africa. These discourses are part of larger narratives of longing and belonging that reflect the themes of African writing in France today.[33]

Jules-Rosette contextualises modern Francophone writers of African origin into this wider diasporic heritage, imbued with explicit political aims from its very conception.

Jules-Rosette's work is also useful its exploration of *Parisianism*, a term which she (and others) use to describe Black writing more closely identified with the capital city than with any nation. The city is thus separate from and parallel to the nation, providing new possibilities:

> While Parisianism is situated with reference to other discourses about integration and assimilation in France, it … is both rebellious and acquiescent, politically activist and individualist.[34]

[33] Bennetta Jules-Rosette, *Black Paris: The African Writers' Landscape* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 14.
[34] ibid, 193.

As Jules-Rosette explains, *Parisianism* escapes a nationalist discourse and is therefore freed to re-examine the question of who belongs in the city: 'Its underlying message supports the social, political and cultural acceptance of Africans, other immigrants and marginal people.'[35] The writers which she includes in this group, including Calixthe Beyala, Jean-Baptiste Tiémélé and Simon Njami, are certainly strongly connected with a new wave of migrant writing in France, with movement to the city and settling there prominent among the central themes they explore.

Odile Cazenave expands on Jules-Rosette's transnational Black Paris in her 2005 work *Afrique-Sur-Seine*. Like Jules-Rosette, she examines the implied readership of such postcolonial works, using geographical approaches to problematize the ways in which reading Black Paris might repeat a centre-periphery binary in the context of contemporary African nationalism, the scars of the French colonial project and the limited spaces allowed for the 'other' within French literary studies.

> To speak of Francophone African literature is equivalent to inscribing this literature in a subspace linked to the French language, where the term "subspace" immediately refers us to notions of dependence and hierarchisation.[36]

This reveals a concern with the problems of hierarchized spaces and linguistic dominance which Cazenave resolves in part through a focus on identity construction and its subversion within African/Parisian novels. She also examines the addressee or intended reader while emphasising the material structures which mean the *actual* reader may differ, conveying a sense of a two-way gaze between Paris and Africa. This gaze is crucial in her final

[35] Ibid., 276
[36] Odile M. Cazenave, *Afrique Sur Seine: A New Generation of African Writers in Paris*, (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2005), 135.

conclusions about new developments in the field since the early 1990s: Cazenave stresses a diversification in approaches to literature about French-African migration, with a 'renewed interest in the reconstruction of a collective historic past,' reflecting a type of continuing interdependence between the geographic areas.[37]

Beurs and Banlieues

Within French and Parisian writing by authors of North African origin, there is also often an emphasis on the binaries implied by dual or multiple identities. *Le Thé au Harem d'Archi Ahmed* is seen as the first *roman beur*: a name from Parisian *verlan* slang which can be understood as 'Arab in the French context': a North African in North Africa would not be a *beur* and thus the name separates young French writers of North African origin from a long tradition of Maghreb authors living in France.[38] This new genre, only thirty years old, is deeply associated with the Paris *banlieue* and with themes such as migration, second-generation anxiety, religious difference, crime, deprivation and social mobility. Ilaria Vitali identifies a long list of nomenclatures used to further describe this field in her review of early critical responses to the *Beur* novel:

> Littérature française d'expression immigrée, littérature franco-maghrébine, littérature arabo-française, littérature francophone, littérature beur, littérature issue de l'immigration maghrébine, littérature des immigrations, littérature de la deuxième génération...[39]

The expectations around *beur* literature are however problematic: once again identity is constructed through difference, emphasising the authors themselves, their homes and their migration status.

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[37] Cazenave, 168.
[38] Mehdi Charef, *Le thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988).
[39] Ilaria Vitali, *Intrangers I: Post-migration et nouvelles frontières de la littérature beur* (Academia, 2012), 122.

An interesting challenge to these sets of binaries can be found in the initiative set up by a group of *beur* writers themselves: the 2010 initiative 'Qui fait la France?' Proposed in reaction to then president Nicolas Sarkozy's 'National Debate' on French republicanism, writers offered an alternative examination of the possibilities offered by 'métissage', a mixed heritage and mixing of cultures which could 'speak for those without a voice, the despised, the people, whether these people are formed by immigration or not.'[40] Their demands were 'the right to be respected as wholly French authors, without qualifications which they believe obscure the artistic dimension of their work.'[41]

Additionally, authors have put forward a term intended to avoid the these different terms: 'intrangers', a play on the word for 'outsider' or 'foreigner' in France, coined by the Algerian writer Y.B. (or Yassir Benmiloud) who said it meant 'that you are a foreigner within your own country: but don't ask me whether the country in question is France or Algeria.'[42] In fact many beur writers come from a second, or even third or fourth, generation of former migrants from North Africa, yet in the first twenty years after it came into existence, *beur* writing was called upon to provide sociological and ethnographic pathways, with authors themselves asked to act as ambassadors for the Paris outskirts. 'Is Charef,' asks Vitali, 'an independent artist, or the special envoy of a particular group?'[43] Meanwhile, these works are also described as 'littérature banlieue, littérature cite' or 'littérature beton': an

[40] 'Collectif « Qui fait la France ? » in interview with Vitali, Ilaria, *Francofonia*, n. 59, Autumn 2010, pp. 125 – 126.
[41] Vitali, *Intrangers I*, 21.
[42] Y.B. *Intrangers I*, 13.
[43] Vitali, *Intrangers I*, 29.

alternative set of constricting labels which connect them to the Paris inner city or the sprawling concrete of the *banlieues*.

A New Identity

Of the three fields, it is the French literature - '*beur'*, Black, and other – which constantly takes us back to the desire to quantify identity, perhaps because of (outdated) assumptions around French identity: that 'Frenchness' permeates all areas of life and without it a migrant can be 'integrated' but not 'assimilated' into the culture. Now younger writers not only reject pigeonholing but actively seek to elude it, trying, as Abdallah Mdarhi-Alaoui puts it, to 'attach the formal functioning of these texts to a theme other than that eternal question of identity'.[44] Of the nomenclatures examined within this section, *Parisianism*, also sometimes described as 'littérature urbaine' seems the most useful to describe new literary movements without forcing writers to represent communities, or turning their art into little more than réportages from Paris' troubled yet somehow exoticised outskirts.

> Almost all [of the authors] nowadays reject the labels 'beur' or 'banlieue', many of them, particularly from this last generation, accept – and even claim – that of 'urban literature', a definition which is more suggestive than descriptive.[45]

The Tardy Arrival of Italian Postcolonialism

This literature review takes a broadly post-colonial approach towards perspectives on migrant fiction in the three countries under examination. What does this mean when it comes to Italy, whose Empire comprised only a few territories, and whose colonial project mainly took place during the fascist era? From the 1880s a newly unified Italy explored the

[44]Mdarhi-Alaoui Abdallah, "Interculturel et littérature beur" in *L'interculturel, réflexion pluridisciplinaire*, (Paris : L'Harmattan, 1995) p. 135 ; Vitali, 134.
[45] Vitali, 11.

potential for economic and political control in North and East Africa, yet its only significant colonial acquisition of this period was Italian Somaliland. Indeed, its imperial projects until the turn of the nineteenth century were both dominated and regulated by competition between France and Great Britain for control within Africa.[46] In 1911, Italian Libya was taken from the Ottoman Empire as a consequence of the Italo-Turkish war.

Until Mussolini became prime minister in 1922, Italy's further expansion plans were limited to neighbouring or nearby territories: brief incursions into Albania and Dalmatia; an aborted invasion of Corfu, *inter alia*. Italy made several aborted attempts to colonise Ethiopia, reflected in nationalist rhetoric before and during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War, which led in 1936 to the military occupation of Ethiopia and eventually to Italian control of most of the Horn of Africa.[47]

Though smaller in scale, Italy's colonial past is not 'prettier' than its European neighbours:

> Italy was not particularly concerned about improving the living conditions of the administered populations. In 1945, indeed, they figured among the poorest of the continent and their education rates were close to zero.[48]

Finally, all of the above colonised regions were either lost in fighting during WWII, or taken out of Italy's control in post-war peace settlements. Thus the creation of an Italian Empire is bound up with the creation of a unified Italy and the rise of fascism; its loss is tied to the complex political situation of postwar Italy.

> Following the signing the Treaty of Paris on February 10, 1947, which deprived Italy of its colonies, this [ruling] class refused to initiate a serious, organic, broad, and definitive debate on the phenomenon of colonialism in the country, one similar to that engaged in by other nations with a colonial history. This debate would have shed light on the positive and the

[46] Patrizia Palumbo, ed. *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present* (University of California Press, 2003).
[47] Palumbo.
[48] Palumbo, 20.

> negative aspects of the colonial period, the values to be preserved, and the myths and legends to be packed away in the attic.[49]

Across many Italian cities, two kinds of museums commemorate two important moments for the formation of Italian identity: the Risorgimento or Unification of Italy, and the Resistance against fascism and the German occupation. These two historical frames leave a gap from the turn of the century to the German occupation of the 1940, a hole in the contemporary construction of Italian identity which encompasses almost all of Italy's colonial projects.

Post-war Italy encompasses further contradictions: the dramatic North-South divide (the racist Lega Nord call for a separation of the wealthy north from the south, often described in racialized terms: southerners, many of whom migrate themselves to the North, are compared to Arabs and Black Africans).[50] Meanwhile migration, slow before 1990, has begun to make a significant impact on Italy, with foreign citizens making up 6.5% of the total population.[51] These are concentrated in Rome (25% of Italy's migrant population) and the cities of the North (63%).[52] However, and most significantly for this project, this migration is not primarily from former Italian colonies, although there is an Ethiopian population of long-standing within urban areas.

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[49] Del Boca, Angelo, "The Myths, Suppressions, Denials and Defaults of Italian Colonialism" in Palumbo, Patrizia, ed. *Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003). 18.

[50] Gramsci viewed southern Italy as a colony of the North.
Gramsci, Antonio, *Selections from Political Writings 1921-1926*, (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1978) 441.

[51] *Exhibition on Italian Migration,* National Museum of Italian Emigration, Rome, display board, 4th September 2015.

[52] ibid.

The largest groups of foreign nationals living in Italy are from Romania and Albania, with 796,477 and 441,396 respectively. There are also significant Chinese, Moroccan, Ukrainian, Filipino and Tunisian populations.[53] Finally, since the Dublin III Regulation of 2003, and increasingly since Libya was destabilised after 2011, Southern Italy has become a first-port-of-call for migrants taking the dangerous boat journey from North Africa to Sicily or Lampedusa, and a conservative estimate allows for 600,000 undocumented or irregular migrants at any one time.[54] Thus when we place Italian migration into a postcolonial framework, it is important to be aware that unlike France or the UK, most migrants do not come from former colonies (although these statistics do not include the growing number of Black and minority ethnic Italians by naturalisation or birth).

Humanitarian projects such as Mare Nostrum are counterbalanced by increasingly hostile reactions as urban migrant populations become more visible, particularly in the case of Islamophobic reactions to growing North African and Somali communities and to refugees from recent Middle East conflicts. Debates over the display of crucifixes in the classroom, the construction of mosques and linguistic diversity sit uneasily between the increasingly outspoken far right and the tentative, often underfunded attempts to implement aspects of multiculturalism. [55]

> This is an Italy which was described in … Salah Methnani's *Immigrato*, as 'il profondo Sud di se stessi', a degraded and degrading place which pushes

[53] Morocco: 403,592; PR China: 170,265; Ukraine: 153,998; Phillipines: 113,686; Tunisia: 100,112, Poland: 99,389; India: 91,855; Moldova: 89,424; Macedonia: 89,066; Ecuador: 80,070; Peru: 77,629; Egypt: 74,599; Sri Lanka: 68, 738; Senegal: 67,510.
ibid.
[54] Amnesty International, "The Global Refugee Crisis: A Conspiracy of Neglect". (London: Amnesty International, 2015).
[55] Stephanie Kirchgaessner, "Clear out African migrants, Lega Nord governor orders in stand-off with Rome", The Guardian. http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/13/lega-nord-migrants-rome-stand-off-luca-zaia. (Accessed 6th October 2021).

> immigrants to 'rock-bottom', changing their image both of a country once dreamed of and mythologized, and of themselves.[56]

Italy is indeed an exceptional case: as Angelo del Boca points out, its colonial history remains under-explored and often pigeonholed as a principally fascist initiative, or even as a legitimate project curtailed by an unfair post-war settlement.[57] While it is rapidly becoming much more diverse, conservative attitudes reflected within media and government rhetoric suggest Italy is not yet ready to address the significant problems of poverty, poor access to education and opportunity and the prejudiced attitudes that many migrants and their descendants suffer on a daily basis.

It is this history which renders Italy such a fascinating subject for comparison within this project. An exceptional case indeed: and yet it is also a case marked by (a guilty) exceptionalism on the part of political, media and even academic commentators, as we shall see in the following review of post-colonial and migrant literature in Italy.

Migration before Literature of Migration

While first-hand accounts and autobiographies of migration existed in Italy before 1990, the first novels on the theme of the country's new migration, Salah Methnani's *Immigrato* and Pap Khouma's *Io, venditore di elefanti*, were both published in this year. Critics agree that this marked the beginning of a new genre in Italian popular fiction. In the last decade, several studies have looked at 'letteratura della migrazione', a term used broadly across

[56] ['The deep South of itself']
Nora Moll, 'Narrative Strategies, Literary Imaging and Reflections on Identity: Constructing a Narrative Community in Italy' in Emma Bond, Guido Bonsaver, and Federico Faloppa, eds., *Destination Italy: Representing Migration in Contemporary Media and Narrative*, Italian Modernities 21 (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2015), 230.
[57] Del Boca, Angelo.

fiction in Italian by migrants and their descendants, and clearly influenced by Anglophone postcolonial studies.

> It is precisely through narrative that most migrants to Italy have been able to publicly speak through a first person perspective and narrate otherwise 'foreign' experiences to a mainly Italian readership.'[58]

Similarly, in her essay within the same work, Nora Moll suggests that fiction provides an opportunity for a dialogue on more equal terms between new and old Italians, or between migrants and the canon.[59]

Ugo Fracassa's *Patria e lettere* begins with an examination of 'colonial' literature in Italy, particularly looking at works which write back against canonical texts.[60] For example, Gabriella Ghermandi's 2007 novel *Regina di fiori e di perle* is read as a response to *Tempo Di Uccidere*, a novel which describes the rape of an Ethiopian woman by an Italian soldier.[61] Although the accounts differ in many ways, *Regina* includes a mirroring of the famous scene in which the protagonist watches the young woman bathing. Here, he is in the pool while she, a guerrilla fighter, watches from a hidden place, transforming the sexual and the colonial gaze. Fracassa contextualises this counter-writing with its other embodiments in Italian literary history, such as the famous fountain scene in *La Dolce Vita*, or a scene in a 2008 thriller by Carlo Lucarelli. In so doing, and within the other reflections on colonial/fascist writing which make up the first half of the book, Fracassa's perspective is informed by a strong sense of continuity within Italian fiction: in this case, the canon can be

[58] Bond, Bonsaver, and Faloppa, *Destination Italy*, 14.
[59] Bond, Bonsaver, and Faloppa, 232.
[60] Ugo Fracassa, *Patria e lettere* (Perrone, 2012).
[61] Gabriella Ghermandi, *Regina di fiori e di perle* (Donzelli, 2011).

expanded to include literature of migration. Despite this – or perhaps because of it, he emphasizes:

> This overlapping of guilt and remorse, of the historical and the private, the colonial and the paternal, do not make a zero-sum, or as in these two instances, each dies within a dense narrative fog, without obliterating the other.[62]

Fracassa see the two texts as in dialogue with each other, yet recognises that examining them side by side cannot necessarily confer literary value or cancel out the effects of Flaiano's place within the literary canon. These concerns with canonical continuity and literary merit arise more than once within the works by Italian scholars on Italian postcolonial and migrant fiction.

Nora Moll traces two lineages which connect Italian postcolonial texts to the Italian literary heritage: irony and rewriting, revealing a strong tendency to intertextuality within Italian migrant fiction of the last twenty years.

> References to other cultural texts become a kind of assemblage of citations which, in a postmodern style, recodifies and brings elements of 'high' and low/popular' culture to the same level.[63]

This concern with intertextuality arises again and again, and as Fracassa points out, brings its own problems:

> In fact such is the conviction, by certain readers and academics, that the literary textuality of migrants corresponds to certain generic, thematic and stylistic schema; recognizable to the point of predictability and distinct from domestic [Italian literary] production, that any specimens that are inconsistent with this critical assumption are unlikely to be perceived as migrant literature.[64]

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[62] Fracassa, *Patria e lettere*, 62.
[63] Bond, Bonsaver, and Faloppa, *Destination Italy*, 225.
[64] Fracassa, *Patria e lettere*, 68.

In comparison to France and the UK which have centuries-long traditions of Black and minority ethnic writing, the relative novelty of this genre in Italy, developing in the 1990s out of migrant autobiographies and 'first-generation' chronicles (as Nora Moll observes) can provide a sort of 'control' sample of migrant literature in a context which is not strictly 'postcolonial'.[65] Only a handful of books exist before the 90s; most of them are not fiction, and many of those authors have connections to Italy's three formerly-colonised regions: Somalia, Ethiopia, Libya, while the new wave of migrant fiction includes writers with more diverse origins.

We can presume these questions of a position within the canon are eluded within contemporary Italian 'genre' fiction, such as the detective stories of Amara Lakhous, which somewhat resemble Zadie Smith's work in their descriptions of multicultural cross sections of Roman society. As Lakhous, of Algerian origin, puts it himself:

> I used the murder mystery [form] to attract attention to what was going on, because this kind of thing happens when there is an emergency. So I said to myself: this needs a body.[66]

Fracassa points out that detective fiction in Italy, or more specifically what he calls 'noir metropolitano', the urban murder mystery, has been successfully used by other writers to 'arrive at a cultured audience by way of the popular one', citing Umberto Eco's *Il nome della rosa* as an example, as well as connecting Lakhous' *Scontro di Civilta* with the 1957 novel *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* by Carlo Emilio Gadda, a similar crime fiction with overlapping and dislocated narratives, set in a Roman neighbourhood very close by.[67]

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[65] Bond, Bonsaver, and Faloppa, *Destination Italy*, 223.
[66] Lakhous cited by Fracassa, p. 81
[67] Fracassa, 'arrivare al pubblico fino attraverso il grosso'; Umberto Eco, *Il nome della rosa: Nuova edizione* (Bompiani, 2012); Carlo E. Gadda, *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* (Milano: Garzanti Libri, 2007).

Several other studies have come out in the last five years, such as Franca Sinopoli's *Postcoloniale italiano, Tra letteratura e storia* (*Italian Postcolonisms through Literature and History*) and Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo's *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity*: it is clear that in the growing field of postcolonial and migration fiction in Italy there is space for further research.[68] While these texts discuss a migrant conception of Italian identity, this is often defined in terms of social engagement and challenges to the status quo. An 'evolution' from autobiography and autofiction to more complex and literary texts also marks a shift away from national and personal identity and the creation of a more literary project across the field. As Fracassa puts it 'What literature can do, and which is precluded from historical discourse … is to give voice to those who remain excluded from [historical] reports.'[69]

Conclusion

'It is the nature of migration to remake a society and the fate of societies to be remade.'[70] This review has touched upon a few points relevant to each literary field: while this is important for the contextualisation of this study, it is crucial to reflect on the limitations of a purely national perspective. In *The Narrative Mediterranean*, Claudia Esposito uses Paul Gilroy's work on *The Black Atlantic* to look at French migrant literature differently, using the Mediterranean Sea as a powerful space of research to avoid binaries and national paradigms.[71] Both frontier and border, the Black Mediterranean can be seen through a long

[68] Palumbo, *A Place in the Sun*; Franca Sinopoli, *Postcoloniale italiano. Tra letteratura e storia* (Novalogos, 2013).
[69] Fracassa, *Patria e lettere*, 85.
[70] Kathleen Paul cited in McLeod, *Postcolonial London*, 23.
[71] Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic - Modernity and Double Consciousness*.

history of movement and interchange as a space of potential, contextualising the current border controls and tragedies of people smuggling within broader geo-historical horizons.[72]

Several works have recently drawn attention to the mutual benefits of interdisciplinary research between literature and human geography with particular emphasis on postcolonial theory and research. In their introduction to *Postcolonial Spaces: The Politics of Place in Contemporary Culture*, Andrew Teverson and Sara Upstone argue that 'geography has been transformed as a discipline, with an increasing awareness of how the discourses of gender, race and class are at work in the process of mapping, planning and representing space.'[73] Space and, consequently, maps play an important role in our understanding of power and material reality in the world, and new developments in human geography reflect on the importance of imaginary and literary spaces within geography. As Clive Barnett observes,

> Postcolonial theory has engaged in a sustained criticism of a dominant imagination of space… It is no accident that an alternative imagination of space – in terms of *movement, mobility, translation and porosity* – should have arisen out of a field… prevalently populated by literary scholars.[74]

Postcolonial literary theory, from Edward Soja to Edward Saïd, has long thought critically about space and its role within hegemonic discourse. Meanwhile, in *Graphs, Maps, Trees* and *An Atlas of the European Novel*, Franco Moretti renders graphically series of connections and coincidence within literature, theorising a new model for literary criticism which could be employed to map elements of my research. [75] Maps were an important

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[72] Claudia Esposito, *The Narrative Mediterranean: Beyond France and the Maghreb*, (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2014).
[73] Teverson and Upstone, *Postcolonial Spaces*.
[74] Barnett, Clive, 'Postcolonialism: Space, textuality and power' in Stuart Aitken, *Approaches to Human Geography*, (Los Angeles: Sage Publications Ltd, 2014), [my emphasis].
[75] Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900*, (Verso Books, 1999); Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (Verso Books, 2007).

signifier of a colonialist perspective on the world, and now there is an opportunity to attempt to map literary and imagined journeys and to look at alternative maps of the three cities under investigation, maps which contest mainstream narrative and reveal new different and opposing elements of the city. This project looks at how spaces are seen and lived by the migrant within literature, as well as how s/he interacts with established narratives of the city.

Migration can be defined both as movement across borders and the act of settling or establishing oneself in a new city,[76] and the focus on imagined geographies aims to bring these two tropes together. C.L Innes suggests that literature about migration combines two forms of narration: the 'domestic/romantic' and the 'adventure/travel/quest' genres, meaning a kind of hybridity is immanent to the genre. [77] This can be compared with several recent studies of writing by Britons of colour and other postcolonial writing, such as James Procter's *Dwelling Places*: a recent tendency is to focus on settling and the community formation, the permanence of a colourful, multicultural Britain.[78] Meanwhile French authors, as demonstrated above, are demanding their own right to hybridity and fluidity; ambivalent positions which stand in sharp contrast not only to the exoticisation and orientalism with which they are received, but also to mainstream narratives of republican French-ness.

[76] Note that where possible the terms 'immigrant' and 'emigrant' have been avoided: in an attempt to treat the loaded language of international movement in as neutral a manner as possible, one term applies to all those who move to a different place: 'migrant'. This is not to say that 'refugee' and 'asylum seeker' do not have their place in this text when appropriate, see **Appendix 2: Definitions.**
[77] Innes, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English*.
[78] Procter, *Dwelling Places*.

It can be argued that some of these negotiations, which in Britain and France have taken sixty years (perhaps three hundred), have been avoided in Italy where postcolonial writing received very little attention until recently. Italy has the most conservative culture of the three and its literary canon is generally deeply respected and slow to change. Yet Italian postcolonial literature, as well as having become relatively popular in a short space of time, reveals a strong intertextuality with both the Italian literary canon and with other European postcolonial texts. In observing this, it is important to remember that Italian 'postcolonial' writing is not necessarily directly connected to Italy's former empire, and indeed many of its writers come from former French or British colonies such as Somalia or Algeria.

In all three fields this hybridity has become more complex over time, challenging simple binaries and being expressed in new ways: more recent works in all three fields tend to bring intersections of class and gender into the picture as well as presenting ethnicity in a more multi-faceted manner.

Following the research presented here on contemporary postcolonial European literature, the project will employ a postcolonial approach, but with an equal focus on all types of migration: from former colonies, for reasons of economic or social mobility, and forced migration, asylum and exile. These themes, however, will guide the structure of the research. Since the two guiding ideas behind this project are how fiction enters into dialogue with and affects wider discourse, and how different kinds of migrants challenge and reimagine the city within fiction, a division by 'types of narrative' and 'types of migration' will render the scope sufficiently broad to answer these questions in detail.

Chapter 1: From Discovery to Ownership

Ah, is this what this place is all about?
Jane Lanyero[1]

But the corner is, it was and it always will be the poorman's lounge. It's where a man wants to be on a hot summer's night. It's cheaper than a bar. Catch a nice breeze and watch the girls go on by.
Bunny Colvin, *The Wire*[2]

Introduction

This chapter examines different perspectives on public space in the city, from arrival to a sense of ownership (albeit not necessarily a complete or secure sense). Side by side with this conceptual journey, it presents a physical journey, looking at different sites in the city and considering how they might be important to a migrant figure. It attempts to chart perspective on the city and its public spaces, as they are imagined before migration, experienced upon arrival, and gradually learned through the process of settling. It posits that the perspective of a newly arrived migrant offers a uniquely useful 'novel gaze' onto seemingly familiar space, and that attempts to record and understand these within fiction of migration hold the potential to disrupt accepted views of the city, including the understanding of the city's shape as concentric, with power concentrated in its centre.

The introduction to this thesis offered some strategies to understanding 'the right to the city' and the emancipatory potential of taking 'ownership' of public space. This chapter brings together different strategies used by migrants within the works studied to achieve

[1] Craig Taylor, *Londoners: The Days and Nights of London Now - as Told by Those Who Love It, Hate It, Live It, Left It and Long for It* (London: Granta Publications Ltd, 2012), 33.
[2] Bunny Colvin in Steve Shill, *Season 3, Episode 2 "All Due Respect" (The Wire)* (HBO, 2019), 3, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=All_Due_Respect_(The_Wire)&oldid=886397367. (Accessed 6th October 2021).

these goals, considering how the social positioning of a recent migrant might complicate or undermine both the sense of 'belonging' and of 'ownership', but taking seriously the need to do so and the partial successes achieved within the novels. To do this it offers a tentative categorisation of migrant public space, ending with an exploration of alternative public spaces, in particular green spaces, and how these might prove restorative or emancipatory.

This chapter looks at three main elements of urban public space, which it categorises as follows: discovery, ownership, and liberation, aiming to provide a taxonomy of the different functions of urban public space in novels of migration. Two novels are examined in detail, chosen because they both subvert our understanding of a migrant's perspective on a major European capital. *Le Roman des Immigrés* (*The Novel of the Immigrants*) by French-Congolese writer Itoua-Ndinga, combines multiple narratives of migrants' experiences in Paris, bringing these together through the voice of a single narrator, a 'reporter' whose stated intention is to chart the stories of 'immigrants' in Paris within a novel. *Il Comandante del Fiume* (*The Commander of the River*), the second novel by Somali-Italian writer Cristina Ubah Ali Farah, is a *bildunsgsroman* which describes the multiple pressures acting on a young boy of Somali origin, using the city of Rome both as backdrop and as an extended metaphor for his own journey. This chapter focuses on open spaces within the urban environment where people spend leisure time or interact socially, considering it them as sites of learning, of discovery, of community-building and of liberation. These include shopping streets, public squares, public transport, and green spaces. These four categories are complemented by the following chapter, which uses a slightly different approach to consider encounters between migrants, taking a more relational approach to the construction of public space.

Power, Migration and Ownership of the City

As set out in the introduction to this thesis, the understanding of public and urban space (not on one, but on many levels) is crucial to the theoretical framework of this project. As it takes from De Certeau and Lefebvre the conception of space as socially produced, so does it take inspiration from their demands for a new, revolutionary and alternative socially produced space, as a prerequisite for social change. It investigates sites of resistance in public space through, as De Certeau identifies, minor subversions and disruptions of power, rather than major overturnings of the social order: thus it considers everyday actions and everyday disruptions within public space.[3] To scrutinise the potential for change through public space requires careful study of its use in the everyday; to consider how space is used and how this is marked by power relations.[4] This scrutiny, as David Highmore observes, involves a complicated reading of the signs around us, and careful consideration of the ways in which the quotidian use of public space in the city reveals patterns of power and,

> As the notion of 'everyday life' circulates in Western cultures under its many guises (Alltagsleben, la vie quotidienne, run-of-the-mill and so on) one difficulty becomes immediately apparent: 'everyday life' signifies ambivalently. On the one hand it points (without judging) to those most repeated actions, those most travelled journeys, those most inhabited spaces that make up, literally, the day to day. This is the landscape closest to us, the world most immediately met. Here the most travelled journey can become the dead weight of boredom, the most inhabited space a prison, the most repeated action an oppressive routine. Here the everydayness of everyday life might be experienced as a sanctuary, or it may bewilder or give pleasure, it may delight or depress. Or its special quality might be its lack of qualities. It might be, precisely, the unnoticed, the inconspicuous, the unobtrusive.[5]

[3] Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*.
[4] Angela D'Ascoli, *Public Space: Henri Lefebvre and Beyond* (Mimesis International, 2018).
[5] Ben Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction* (Abingdon, UK: Taylor & Francis, 2002), 1.

Highmore shows both the reasons to survey daily use of public space and problem of multiple interpretations of the way in which people go about their business within public space. As Timothy Mitchell states, 'the so-called obstacles and inhibitions to resistance are the effects of hegemonic power, which may include the material/ symbolic inducement of fear, leading to inaction and perhaps paralysis.'[6] To search for the radical does not solely mean to look for major acts which overturn the order of power, and in the context of this study such a search might constitute an exaggerated response to the data available. Thus while this chapter traces journeys and considers the positioning of migrant bodies within public space in terms of power and transformation, it is also concerned with the relationship between the everyday and those who are understood as 'other'. In other words, what happens to everyday sites and routine sights when a stranger comes to town?

According to Harvey's 'relational view of space' (2004), the two first chapters of this thesis have more in common than it might seems. It is not possible to completely separate a seemingly *static* space which makes up the public or shared parts of the city from the *relational* space mapped to work out journeys, encounters and pathways.

> Who, then, has a right to be in a space that is nominally designated as public and what does this have to do with how politics is conducted in the public sphere? What Lefebvre calls "the right to the city" has been and continues to be a persistent issue. How is that right claimed and expressed? What happens when we construe that right not only as a right of access for all to what already exists but as a right to change and transform the spaces of the city into a different kind of living environment compatible with quite different social relations by attacking both its material forms as well as dominant discourses of representation?[7]

[6] Timothy Mitchell, "Everyday Metaphors of Power," *Theory and Society* 19, no. 5 (1990): 545–77.
[7] Harvey, "Space as a Keyword," 13.

This chapter draws its understanding of urban public space from theorists including Lefebvre, who discussed space as a social construct, and more recently social scientists looking at how urban public space can be understood, claimed and transformed: Saskia Sassen, David Harvey, Sharon Zukin, Lorretta Lees.[8] These different viewpoints: on social movements, on gentrification in traditionally migrant areas, and on how diversity and globalisation has transformed the modern European city, are briefly introduced to set the scene for the three novels (which are set respectively in Paris, London and Rome). Peter Goheen and Nancy Fraser show how (given that 'politics' can be defined as that which takes place in public) an analysis of literary descriptions of public space is of necessity political, and since a major focus of this chapter is the interactions with the 'other' that happen in public, there is a political thread running through the chapter.[9]

Much has been written on apparently homogenous (or at least distinct) migrant communities and so this chapter aims to focus on the individual's experience of public space in the city, and the city as contact zone,[10] the moments of interaction between different people, the individual's relationship with modern urban space and from that, the formation of new kinds of community. The idea of being 'thrown together' calls into question the way different kinds of diasporic communities rub shoulders, taking a hard look at apparent site

[8] Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*, (Princeton University Press, 2001); David Harvey, *The Right to the City*, 2008; Harvey, "Space as a Keyword."; Sharon Zukin, *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places*, (Oxford; New York: OUP USA, 2011); Loretta Lees, "Gentrification and Social Mixing: Towards an Inclusive Urban Renaissance?," *Urban Studies* 45, no. 12 (November 2008): 2449–70, https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098008097099.

[9] Peter G. Goheen, "Public Space and the Geography of the Modern City," *Progress in Human Geography* 22, no. 4 (August 1998): 479–96, https://doi.org/10.1191/030913298672729084; Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text*, no. 25/26 (1990): 56, https://doi.org/10.2307/466240.

[10] Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," in *Negotiating Academic Literacies: Teaching and Learning across Languages and Cultures*, ed. Vivian Zamel and Ruth Spack (Abingdon-on-Thames: Psychology Press, 1998), 171–185.

of proximity and socialising between people of different backgrounds, and investigating ways in which public space is hierarchised for different perceived identities and levels of 'belonging'.

Exterior spaces provide a wide and varied source of social observation and analysis in the urban environment, one which drew a great deal of critical attention in the years following the '9/11' terrorist attacks in central New York, throughout the uprisings in the Arab world which began in 2011, and the overlapping series of 'Occupy' movements in European and North American cities. They reveal the structure of societies: where do people congregate outside? Who uses streets and how? Who meets whom? Who is included, and who marginalised, or simply left out? To what extent are public and exterior areas gendered and marked by 'race' and class, and how do communities mark their presence on them? Do cities really contain 'no-go' zones and do these affect everybody equally? While the interior space might reveal more about individuals, about identity and about 'authentic' elements of culture and behaviour, the outside is a hybrid space, where peoples and cultures meet. This is not to say that urban exteriors are necessarily accessible, welcoming, democratic, or even 'neutral'. Cities are complex, inorganic structures where institutional planning and the outward signs of political powers contrast with the flux and even chaos of large, changing populations. As such, exterior spaces in novels provide fascinating moments of movement and interaction.

In her 2011 essay, 'Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street', Judith Butler takes Tahrir Square as her starting point to investigate how struggle is embodied in important

exterior spaces such as the public square, and how 'bodies act together' to institute moments of political change.

> [T]he bodies on the street redeploy the space of appearance in order to contest and negate the existing forms of political legitimacy – and just as they sometimes fill or take over public space, the material history of those structures also work on them, and become part of their very action, remaking a history in the midst of its most concrete and sedimented artifices.[11]

Butler looks at the conditions which make such a 'takeover' of public space possible, positing freedom as not embodied in a person but, after Arendt, as a 'relation between us, or, indeed, among us.'[12] Tahrir Square held such liberating potential in part because it became a space where 'sociability' and a division of daily tasks; cleaning, cooking, sleeping, were carried out together. Moreover, while Butler emphasises the importance of the 'real-time' photographs, videos and updates sent from the square which surely contributed to the impact of the occupation, she also shows how 'to walk upon the street', as an individual, or a small group, or in a side street rather than Tahrir Square, can also be a political embodiment of the rights, not just of the individual, but of a collective or an oppressed group. Harvey expresses this in terms of 'the commons': 'Syntagma Square in Athens, Tahrir Square in Cairo and the Plaza de Catalunya in Barcelona were public spaces that became an urban commons as people assembled there to express their political views and make demands'.[13]

While Butler's essay provides a broadly optimistic perspective on people's relations with the urban environment, David Harvey looks at how ownership of the city has been changed and

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[11] Judith Butler, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street," *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies.*, 2011, http://www.eipcp.net/transversal/1011/butler/en.
[12] Butler.
[13] David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (Verso Books, 2012), 73.

complicated in a neoliberal political context in his 2008 essay, *The Right to the City*, written shortly after the 'Credit Crunch' of 2007-8 which revealed inherent weaknesses in how homes were built, sold and financed in American cities. This looks at how urban design and city planning has been adapted to suit the interests of big business, and reflects, like Butler, on how occupying and using space can challenge these ownerships. Harvey sees a political reclamation of public space –and private property- as necessary to combat the wider injustices of capitalism.

> One step towards unification of these struggles is to focus on the right to the city as both a working slogan and a political ideal, precisely because it focuses on who it is that commands the inner connection that has prevailed from time immemorial between urbanization and surplus production and use. The democratization of the right to the city and the construction of a broad social movement to enforce its will is imperative.[14]

Harvey's conception of urban space transformed into a commons is useful as a working definition of how 'ownership' can happen within a defined place and time. However this is a fluid and shifting 'ownership':

> The commons is not to be construed [...] as a particular kind of thing, asset or even social process, but as an unstable and malleable social relation between a particular self-defined social group and those aspects of its actually existing or yet-to-be-created social and/or physical environment deemed crucial to its life and livelihood.[15]

This concept of a temporary social possession, inflected with a utopian imagining of a freer, more permanent ownership of the city, is essential to the arguments put forward in this chapter on how migrants create 'ownership' within public space. In the neoliberal city, rapid development, regeneration and gentrification can transform an area, undermining the commons implicit in the use of public space, and so it is essential to consider the

[14] David Harvey, "The Right to the City," *New Left Review*, II, no. 53 (October 2008): 23–40.
[15] Harvey, *Rebel Cities*, 73.

temporariness of the commons, even while searching for the autonomous and emancipatory politics which inflect a site.

While Butler and Harvey bring very different analyses to their arguments, these two perspectives both reflect a new concern with how urban public spaces can be realised as sites of political power. It is important to view the city as this powerful source of potential connections, as a network of contested spaces which can be activated by people's bodies, in order to reflect on how public spaces are used within fiction of migration. While many of the characters hold a marginalised position in the city, this does not mean they are powerless, or that there is no possibility of meaningful links with other city-dwellers. Instead it means that such liberating acts might be more subtle or veiled. Butler tells us that

> And when crowds move outside the square, to the side street or the back alley, to the neighborhoods where streets are not yet paved, then something more happens. At such a moment, politics is no longer defined as the exclusive business of public sphere distinct from a private one, but it crosses that line again and again, bringing attention to the way that politics is already in the home, or on the street, or in the neighborhood, or indeed in those virtual spaces that are unbound by the architecture of the public square. [16]

The texts studied in this chapter reflect these alternative spaces of public action, yet in each of the case studies, that line between public and private, between political potential and political act, is crossed and re-crossed.

The commons, however temporary or transient they might be; the partial claim by a migrant figure of her/his 'right to the city'; the utopia implied in the imagined city and the struggle to learn the real city through small acts of resistance to the everyday; these themes will be picked up in the textual analysis which follows. The chapter looks at the positioning and

[16] Butler, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street."

movement of migrant bodies through the cities and the different elements which allow the development of a sense of ownership; through acts of solidarity and the establishment of communities, and through the process of observing, describing and communicating the city to others. The fictional descriptions of urban public space through the eyes of migrants obviously add further levels of mediation to the understanding of public space and resistance presented above, and the imagined space of the fictional migrant city holds the potential for redemption, a coherent narrative which is hard to find in the 'real' city. The final aim of this chapter is to consider how the novel of migration can offer an imaginative space for both utopic and dystopic conceptions of migration to European urban centres, and how these imaginings might contribute to wider discourse on contemporary migration.

Discovery: the Migrant 'Flaneur'

This first section considers the city as first seen by an 'outsider', considering tropes of arrival and the dangers and difficulties that accompany unfamiliarity. Many novels of migration address this theme, with some migrants arriving with a great deal of fore-knowledge and the expectation of joining a welcoming community, while others first encounter the city as a foreign enigma, bringing little with them and having to 'learn the city' from scratch. Following an overview of the experience of discovery and the physical components common to descriptions of arrival, it turns to a highly unusual example, Itoua-Ndinga's *Le Roman des Immigrants* (*The Novel of the Immigrants*) to examine how the act of discovery can be politicised, subverted and questioned. In the following section, it traces a single story from the same novel to look at how discovery, alienation and newness can eventually give way to a sense of belonging, and even ownership.

Itoua-Ndinga is a writer from the Republic of the Congo (Brazzaville)[17] who first came to Paris as a student, an experience which influences his loosely autobiographical first novel, *Maman je reviens bientôt* (*Mother, I'm Coming Back Soon*).[18] He has also written two previous plays- 'Le Banquet De Nganga-Mayélé' ('The Feast of Nganga-Mayélé) in 2009, a farcical representation of an imaginary African republic and 'Les Muselées' ('The Muzzled') which invokes an imaginary world of religion and myth.[19] His two novels were published by celebrated Paris publisher *Présence Africaine*, but did not enjoy major commercial success.[20] For this reason, this is the first comprehensive academic study of Itoua-Ndinga's work. This thesis features many texts which have garnered intense critical interest: this chapter, by contrast, introduces a fascinating experimental migrant writer who produces varied emotive and deeply political fiction, and it is my hope that Itoua-Ndinga's contribution to literature of migration in the French language will attract more attention as a result of this research.

Expectations and Discovery

Certain well-known monuments within the three cities: the Eiffel Tower, the Houses of Parliament, Rome's Coliseum and so on are configured (within the novels studied and more widely) as more or less straightforward seats of power, arising frequently in the context of urban administration, historical and imperial symbolism, or exclusionary elitism. It is notable that these important symbolic places are less often seen within the narratives than the inner

[17] To avoid confusion with DRC and in keeping with Itoua-Ndinga's own choice of language, the Republic of the Congo is referred to from here on as Congo (Brazzaville).
[18] Itoua-Ndinga, *Maman Je Reviens Bientot* (Len, 2014).
[19] Itoua-Ndinga, *Les muselées: Un drame français en deux actes* (L'Harmattan, 2011); Itoua-Ndinga, *Le banquet de Nganga-Mayélé* (L'Harmattan, 2009).
[20] "Le Roman Des Immigrés - Deuxième Édition Revue et Corrigée, Itoua Ndinga - Livre, Ebook, Epub," https://www.editions-harmattan.fr/index.asp?navig=catalogue&obj=livre&no=48511. (Accessed 29th September 2019).

city, the ethnically diverse marketplace, the banlieue or other exterior manifestation of a minority community. However, as John Clement Ball observes, these great monuments often play an important role in the way the city is imagined before arrival.[21] In his example, the Indian cousins of Sophie Mol in *The God of Small Things* are given a present from London: 'two ballpoint pens – the top halves filled with water in which a cut-out collage of a London streetscape was suspended. Buckingham Palace and Big Ben.'[22] While a present or a product may be part of the imagining of the city from afar, Ball points out that for writers, this is more likely to be 'a set of ideas that coalesce around the signifier 'London''.[23] And after arrival, the city that is seen can be mapped over a city imagined from afar, with the monuments of empire replaced, perhaps, by more mundane sights.

This lag between the geography of the city as it is learned or imagined from afar, and the city from the perspective of the '(wo)man in the street' is itself a postcolonial question, one which itself goes back to the geography of Empire and the mapping processes which sustained a colonial project through both soft and hard politics. The three cities, London, Paris and Rome, were constructed as "centres" and taught as such across the world, and arguably after most former colonies gained their independence, new educational tools, cultural capital and new media continued to promote the idea of the European capitals not just as wealthy and important, but as centres. Thus, even when the stories told are not of a migrant traveling from a former colony to the capital of its former coloniser, there is a colonial element to be considered, which in the context of this research means there is also a decolonising impulse to explore:

[21] Ball, *Imagining London*.
[22] Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 1996).
[23] Ball, *Imagining London, 4.*

> The question is whether the real development of London or Manchester can be understood without reference to India, Africa and Latin America any more than can the development of Kingston (Jamaica) or Bombay be understood without reference to the former.[24]

The issue of former colonial connections, and the more recent issue of globalisation, link cities across the world through history and memory. (These are discussed in greater depth in the final chapter, "Writing on the City"). Within the descriptions of London, Paris and Rome in the novels studied exist global links to other places, and the parallels evoked by the 'global city' in the contemporary age.

> There is now a world culture, but we had better make sure that we understand what this means. It is marked by an organisation of diversity rather than by a replication of uniformity. No total homogenisation of systems of meaning and expression has occurred, not does it appear likely that there will be one any time soon. But the world has become one network of social relationships, and between its different regions there is a flow of meanings as well as of people and goods.[25]

Absolute Beginners?

The city as it is imagined from afar holds within it a finite number of universalised, ubiquitous landmarks, metonyms in the form of monuments that stand for the whole city and its name in everyone's eyes. Yet there can be a striking difference between this imagined sense of place, the world-wide shorthand for the city which is collectively imagined using a similar pictorial vocabulary everywhere, and the lived experience of the city's inhabitants. The global identity of the world city, honed by politicians, crafted by tourist boards, property developers and *acronymed* by the media, is not a simple or neutral identity.

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[24] Anthony D. King, *Urbanism, Colonialism, and the World-Economy: Cultural and Spatial Foundations of the World Urban System* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1990), 78.
[25] Ulf Hannerz, "Cosmopolitans and Locals in World Culture," *Theory, Culture & Society* 7, no. 2–3 (June 1, 1990): 237, https://doi.org/10.1177/026327690007002014.

In Craig Taylor's collection of interviews, *Londoners*, Jane Lanyero, a recent asylum seeker, a political refugee from Uganda, recounts how she was asked to travel from Gatwick to a bed and breakfast in Harrow on the Hill.

> Good enough, I could read and write. But I'd never been on a train, I didn't know what the train of London is like. You're told to follow the Circle Line, then change to Metropolitan Line, then change to this line, when you get to this station you can change to that platform. I said, God, be my help. You go up, you go down, you come out … I didn't know. I was scared to ask because you see all the white people around and don't know how to approach them. You say good morning to someone and they just look at you. Or everybody's sitting with their newspaper, reading to themselves. *Ah, is this what this place is all about?* I didn't talk to nobody. And it was so cold! I came in July, but it felt very very cold.[26]

It's impossible here to chart the differing knowledge and projections of the city which migrant actors bring with them, but several important strands emerge. A common trope in real life-accounts by refugees and asylum seekers such as Jane Lanyero,[27] is a feeling of shock at the difference of the new city from all that has been familiar. Rather than focusing on what was expected: internationally known sites or monuments, these accounts tend to describe the difficulty of negotiating the city: 'The people at the bed and breakfast were very welcoming. When I came in, the manager said, 'Are you Jane? I've been expecting you - what happened?' I told him, my goodness, if only you people knew what I've been

[26] Taylor, *Londoners*. [my emphasis]
Lanyero's account continues:
I had my papers and directions to take me to Harrow on the Hill, they told me the house number. But I had no clue that houses had numbers in one direction. I'd be going one way and then find that I was going the wrong way. I think I left at 9.30 in the morning and I got to Harrow on the Hill at about eight o'clock in the evening/ Eight o'clock! It's not that I stopped anywhere, but at Victoria Station alone it took me four hours to get from the mainline trains into the Underground station. Then the Underground train, even when it's coming, I felt too scared to get on. I waited for the first train to pass to see what the people are doing and then I waited for the second one to pass too, because I still didn't know what to do. I said to myself, let me see how they do it: they're very confident, they just walk and go into it. But I didn't know, is this door going to open or not? Because you see the door opening and sometimes they're pressing buttons … It was so scary. Never mind the gap!

[27] Taylor.

through.'[28] Within fiction, evocative accounts of the deep unfamiliarity of *arrival* are sometimes poignant, sometimes comic. Adah's confusion and feeling of coldness upon arrival in England in *Second-Class Citizen* is a trope repeated through migrant literature up to the present day : 'But if, as people said, there was plenty of money in England, then why did people give their visitors this poor, cold welcome?'[29]

By contrast, the hapless fate of the two Cameroonian protagonists of J. R. Essomba's novel *Le Paradis du Nord* is played for comic effect. Waking up after a long trip in a lorry from Spain, Jojo and Charlie struggle to buy a ticket and enter the métro, find that the address that Charlie's cousin has given them is not correct, and finally decide to begin their odyssey in the one place they have heard of, migrant centre Château Rouge.

> One day, at the Sovotel, I overheard the conversation of two Africans who lived in Paris. And they said that if one goes to Château Rouge, there are so many Africans there that it feels like being in Africa. So how about we try Château Rouge?[30]

Château Rouge and the rest of the 18e *arrondissement* are often mentioned within the French-language genre as a known place whose reputation has crossed the world. Like Jojo and Charlie, many new arrivals need to quickly move to these essential places within the shared vocabulary of newly-arrived migrants.[31] As one young man tells Abdulrazak Gurnah, when he met his more settled friend: 'No, he said, now that I had arrived I must go to the Home Office and ask for asylum. So he gave me the money and the next day I went to Croydon, yes, to Lunar House'.[32] Lunar House, where the UK Home Office takes preliminary

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[28] Taylor, 35.
[29] Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen* (Heinemann, 1994), 33.
[30] Jean-Roger Essomba, *Le paradis du Nord* (Editions Présence Africaine, 2000), 77.
[31] Alain Mabanckou, *Tais-Toi Et Meurs* (Pocket, 2012); Alain Mabanckou, *Bleu, blanc, rouge: Roman* (Présence africaine, 1998); Essomba, *Le paradis du Nord*; Fatou Diome, *Ketala* (Paris: J'ai lu, 2007); Abdourahman Waberi, *Transit* (Gallimard, 2003); Sami Tchak, *Place des fêtes* (Gallimard, 2001).
[32] Ali Smith et al., *Refugee Tales*, ed. David Herd (Comma Press, 2016), 37.

asylum registrations, arises frequently in such chronicles, as do reception centres in Rome and Paris: so do important shopping centres such as Brixton or Château Rouge, major travel terminals such as the Gare du Nord, Victoria Coach Station, Heathrow or Termini Station in Rome; and charity or aid centres such as *France Terre d'Asile* in Paris. Termini Station, for example, which arises throughout this study, reveals itself as an alternative *centre* of Rome.

> It is the space where many immigrants gather since it is the location of all arrivals and departures. It is also the point from which any linear knowledge of the city becomes impossible, because the city becomes the projection of personal maps: these can be facilitated by official maps, but not documented.[33]

Impending disaster and catastrophe is revealed by the difficulties of discovering the city in tragic novels such as *Le Paradis du Nord*, *Transit* or *Harare North*.[34] In these and other similar novels, the protagonist is doomed to never gain ownership of the city. Yet despite the feelings of alienation, the 'cold welcome', and the sense of confusion, there is no *absolute beginner*: each new arrival carries with him/her a certain knowledge of the city.

A different trend can be observed in novels which describe the migration experience more or less explicitly in terms of a learning experience, such as the student narrative in Xiaolu Guo's novel *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers*, Amit Chaudhuri's *Odysseus Abroad* or the very recent *In The Light of What We Know* by Zia Haider Rahman.[35] Here the migrant subject might be looking for a city s/he knows about from prior learning, and this category usually features characters with greater wealth, education or cultural capital.[36]

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[33] Graziella Parati, "Where Do Migrants Live? Amara Lakhous's 'Scontro Di Civiltà per Un Ascensore a Piazza Vittorio,'" *Annali d'Italianistica* 28 (2010): 147.
[34] Essomba, *Le paradis du Nord*; Waberi, *Transit*; Brian Chikwava, *Harare North* (Random House UK, 2011).
[35] Xiaolu Guo, *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers* (Vintage, 2008); Amit Chaudhuri, *Odysseus Abroad* (Oneworld Publications, 2015); Zia Haider Rahman, *In the Light of What We Know*, (Picador, 2015).
[36] Umut Erel, "Migrating Cultural Capital: Bourdieu in Migration Studies," *Sociology* 44, no. 4 (August 1, 2010): 642–60, https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038510369363.

Nonetheless, this journey is often a steep learning curve: these are huge, constantly evolving cities and prior learning is revealed to be incomplete or inaccurate. 'But we were colonised by them,' thinks the protagonist of *Odysseus Abroad*, 'how is it that our cities are so different? How come I'm so little prepared for here?'[37]

A Different Perspective: Discovering the City in *Le Roman des Immigrés*

Itoua-Ndinga's 2014 novel *Le Roman des Immigrés* (*The Novel of the Immigrants*) takes none of these three perspectives and yet covers all of them: its protagonist-narrator is not a 'migrant' (although he has recently arrived in Paris) but a 'reporteur sans frontières', an 'intrepid' reporter whose stated aim is to explain the migrant city to his unknowing readers.[38] The mediation of the narrator constructs distance and unfamiliarity for the reader, a formal choice laden with irony which frequently and pointedly underestimates the reader's existing knowledge of Paris as, for example, when he explains what KFC is. 'Opposite the Château-Rouge métro station there is a fast-food shop commonly known as KFC, one of France's main specialists in rapid cuisine and takeaway meals.'[39] This 'reporteur', who uses family and friendship connections to access the stories told within migrant communities, takes a tongue-in-cheek journalistic position which also satirises the ways in which European reporters profile Africa. The result is a patchwork of different stories of migrants in Paris mediated by the narrative voice and a city gradually revealed through a faux-innocent, performatively "objective" journalistic account.

[37] Chaudhuri, *Odysseus Abroad*, 10–11.
[38] Itoua-Ndinga, *Le roman des immigrés*. **[translations mine : see Appendix I, notes on translation]**
[39] Itoua-Ndinga, 66.

The first part of this chapter thus examines how the narrator's position towards the French capital is constructed, and how the 'discovery' of the new city reverses colonial tropes and destabilises the reader's existing knowledge of Paris. It compares the narrator's outsider perspective to the ways in which migrants 'discover' the city in other works including *Forest Gate* and *Un Roman Étranger*, looking at how journeys of discovery build up partial pictures of the European city.[40] This comparison helps to reflect how migration to a major European capital and negotiation of its geographies is a blend of familiarity and discovery, tentatively separating fragments of the experience of migration from the powerful, confident self-representation of the narrator as a person who is apparently *not* a migrant; notionally unaffected by the patterns of exploitation and poverty that he witnesses.

While the 'reportage' style is unusual for a novel of migration, it means that multiple individual stories are compiled within a single adventure. In addition to these individuals, the narrator himself raises questions about one person vis-a-vis the 'migrant city'. This section analyses the narrator's gaze, thinking about the power structures which accompany an African man in the French capital, as well as thinking about the novel's multiple references to Parisian literature. Is it possible to be a migrant *flaneur*? How should his walks through busy North African markets or his detached gaze as the African churches empty on a Sunday afternoon be interpreted?

In addition to these encounters between the narrator and the city streets, this section looks at the crowd scenes in the streets of the 'migrant' areas of Paris such as La Chapelle and

[40] Akinti, *Forest Gate*; Khalid Lyamlahy, *Un roman étranger* (Editions Présence Africaine, 2017).

Belleville , and the different ways in which these moments, deliberately constructed to recall urban scenes from classic French novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, place the 'migrant city' into a literary continuum of descriptions of Paris, referencing the position of the *flaneur* as both of and outside the crowd. This section compares the way mood, danger and excitement are constructed with reference to other works which analyse crowd scenes, and ventures some observations about the strangeness and familiarity of crowds in the migrant context.[41] It considers the public square, public transport, shopping centres and businesses which make up what we might generalise as 'migrant Paris'.

Mapping Migrant Centres

In the opening chapter of *Le Roman des Immigrés*, the narrator sits in the small studio flat of his friend Gabriel, watching and listening as his compatriot cooks a Congolese dish - "trois pièces" - [42] and tells him about his exploitative landlady, a woman who only rents to migrants desperate for accommodation, and then the story of Geneviève (on whom, more below). This is a frame which will be repeated throughout the novel: a description of a site in the city frequented and used by Paris' migrant populations, a story-teller who is him/herself a migrant; the narrator as a conduit to reveal the story to the audience, often concluding a chapter with a summative remark or some analysis of the situation.

> So I took up my place in Gabriel's room, despite the smell of mould and the presence of asbestos. I had no choice. In the job of Reporter Without Borders, one has to make sacrifices: our lives are offered up upon the altar of humanity… He told me the story with a mocking half-smile and I couldn't really understand this derisive, unfamiliar and childish attitude he had that day.[43]

[41] John Plotz, *The Crowd: British Literature and Public Politics* (University of California Press, 2000).
[42] Itoua-Ndinga, *Le roman des immigrés*, 7.
[43] Itoua-Ndinga, 8.

The narrator is staying with his cousin in a flat in the city's northern banlieue, but Gabriel frequently acts as his guide, showing him the places where migrants gather and introducing him to subjects of diverse countries of origin. As their meal of salt cod in peanut marinade with coconut 'gently permeated the small room with its scent',[44] the room is redolent of their birthplace, but the stories are of the casual exploitation, racist violence and squalid living conditions of migrant Paris, and are echoed in the surroundings, 'a maid's room ... on the sixth floor of an old building from the 1900s [which] cost Gabriel 262 euros.'[45] The narrative frequently gives exact prices, exact names and places, and describes those living on the breadline with details of their low salaries, their budgets and their expenditures, one of many ways in which it refers self-consciously and repeatedly back to French nineteenth century novels such as the works of Balzac and Zola, and their own descriptions of poverty and exploitation in the French capital. These echoes of a French literary heritage continue throughout the novel, situating the explorations of the streets of Paris deliberately into a French literary heritage, and revealed through the narrator's own commentary on the lurid and everyday stories he hears. 'At the start, the story seemed pretty banal to me. I thought that he was re-telling the plot of *La dame aux camélias* by Alexandre Dumas fils.'[46]

The first of the journeys that the narrator and Gabriel take together begins with a lengthy journey into the heart of the 'migrant city', the Gare du Nord in the 18th *arrondissement*. This journey, from the narrator's cousin's home in La Défense, by bus and then RER (Parisian mainline train) and métro, is described in terms of an adventure of discovery, in the spirit of

[44] Itoua-Ndinga, 7.
[45] Itoua-Ndinga, 7.
[46] Itoua-Ndinga, 7.

a stranger visiting the city, and recalling descriptions of European explorers 'discovering' parts of Africa. Firstly, and alone, the narrator loses his way and boards the 161 bus Argenteuil to La Défense, where he meets Gabriel and takes two underground trains towards the Gare Du Nord. On this journey from the margins of the city into its heart, Gabriel and the narrator listen to people talking in multiple languages, including Arabic, Wolof and Lingala.

> Next to me, impatient travellers paced on the spot because they were going to be late for work or for their doctors' appointments. All the same we got to *Pont de Bezons*, then crossed over the Seine to arrive at *Quatre Chemins Aragon* station where African and Maghreb women climbed on through the back doors of the bus (which is against the law) with their enormous, cumbersome pushchairs. Around me I could hear their *Salaam Aleikum*s, *Waleikum Asalaam*s, *Nangadef*s, *Mboté na yo*s.[47]

There is an air of rebellion among the women boarding the back of the bus, and a rich description of chatter and bustle is added to the narrator's frequent comparisons of migrant Paris with other places and in particular parts of Africa. The scene is described in precise detail; the bus number, the number of time it crosses the Seine on its way to La Défense, the regulations which the bus passengers follow or ignore. Direct comparisons are established with similar journeys in Congo-Brazzaville:

> After the *Place de Belgique*, at a bus stop the name of which now escapes me, I also heard greetings every kilometre which reminded me of those I used to hear in the markets of Poto-Poto, of Moungali or of Ouénzé, etc.[48]

The trip becomes a sort of odyssey across Paris, following defined and recognisable 'migrant routes': from La Défense the pair take the RER to Châtelet, where they change for Métro 4 going north to the Gare du Nord, with Gabriel explaining features of the public transport system all the way. The short trip on Métro 4 represents a continuous transformation into

[47] Itoua-Ndinga, 60.
[48] Itoua-Ndinga, 60.

an area where black and minority ethnic people are the majority, which increases on the last leg of their journey as the carriage begins to fill up with other people of colour.

> After this period of waiting, we rolled onwards again to reach the Château d'Eau stop, where a cloud of black immigrants, like a colony of insects, probably originating from Nigeria or Ghana, with a jumble of ringing, bothersome accents, crossed and passed and displaced the women and the men heading to the exit. They were shouting to beat the band. They were begging and dealing and negotiating.[49]

These passages reproduce some of the more exaggerated and offensive language used to describe migrants in Europe: 'a cloud', 'a colony of insects', with heavy irony, but they also reflect some of the language used in nineteenth century realist novels such as Zola's *La Bête Humaine* which uncovers the darkness and oppression of those who work to serve the machine in the age of railways. The text also refers directly to *La Bête Humaine*: 'Gabriel told me that between La Défense and Étoile, our human beast would pass under the Seine.[50] Through this multidirectional intertextuality, Itoua-Ndinga both others and normalises the migrants moving through the city centre: shocking and frightening according to some current media discourse, they also form a deeply familiar crowd scene within Parisian fiction. The effect is disturbing, grounded only by the gaze of the narrator as he observes different groups of people in a patchworked, chaotic crowd scene.

Throughout the novel, the *reporteur*'s apparently objective research and reportage goals are belied by the strong and loaded language he uses. Outside the station as the pair continue their journey on foot through the crowded North- and West-African markets of Chateau Rouge, the *reporteur* describes the street vendors as 'grédins' and 'racaille': rascals and riff-raff: ' I had very quickly understood,' he tells us, 'that these were a band of devils just

[49] Itoua-Ndinga, 62.
[50] Itoua-Ndinga, 61.

waiting to strip you of your savings'.[51] Thus two maps are created: the close description of the public transport system excluding all places irrelevant to the daily lives of migrant communities, and the path cut through a wild place where our heroes must negotiate temptation and danger. Both these paths; the negotiation of local social systems and institutional conventions, and the difficult interactions with 'dangerous' local peoples, mimic French colonial surveys into West Africa, while presenting a distorted, complex positionality to the reader.

The journey of discovery continues after they leave the train and walk around the busy shopping streets of the 18e *arrondissement*, and the text once again evokes an outsider's perspective by combining the mundane - they pass McDonalds, Quick (a similar French chain), MoneyGram and so on - with the deliberately exoticised.

> Coming out of KFC, we entered into the market strictly speaking, in which a multitude of *Zaïroises* [sic: women from DRC] were crying the wares they were selling. I could have been in the market of Poto-poto or Moungali, where I'm used to this kind of spectacle.[52]

Here in the 18e, migrants and Parisians of multiple backgrounds are thrown together. Anything can be bought, from fruit to cloth to marijuana, and the area is shown here as the centre of migrant Paris. The narrator's lengthy journey from La Défense is mirrored by the other people moving *en masse* from other parts of the city. As the narrator watches them, he repeatedly compares what he sees in Paris to scenes he has witnessed in Congo (Brazzaville) and other parts of Africa, using the 'reporteur sans frontières' character to reverse the exploratory gaze back onto the French capital. For the narrator, 'normal' is elsewhere, and so other places are used as a point of reference to describe Paris.

[51] Itoua-Ndinga, 63.
[52] Itoua-Ndinga, 67.

> As we walked, we sometimes met hazy, bizarre people who occasionally resembled others I would meet along the odysseys of a reporter without borders in Colombia, in Jamaica, in Lagos in Nigeria or in the Pool or Plateaux regions of Congo (Brazzaville) (the land of my birth).[53]

Despite these observations on the complexity of the narrator's mediation strategies, an effect is created and repeated throughout the novel of big crowds, of bustle and hustle, and of multitudes moving purposefully around the narrator as he observes. The narrator positions himself variously as a *flaneur*, a tourist, a guide translating the city for the reader and a reporter 'objectively' feeding back what he sees; both innocent and knowledgeable, detached and passionate, an outsider who is nonetheless the reader's route to understanding Paris.

As the novel unfolds, the narrator creates a verbal map of Paris: the different key areas of the migrant city are described, linked by his journeys and by the different stories, and rarely referring to any place where migrants do not congregate. The centre of Paris is shifted to the Gare du Nord, connected not to the rest of metropolitan Paris (the central area of the urban conglomeration made up of the twenty original *arrondissements*) but by bus and train to the *banlieues* where migrants live. Thus the city is mapped as a divided city: Itoua-Ndinga uses the transport system both to unite and to separate. While the *reporteur* has a privileged position as a kind of external observer, for the migrants whose stories are told the city is mapped out with dividing lines, some visible, some invisible, which represent limitations on their freedom or areas under the influence of different power structures. This chapter has looked at the 18e *arrondissement* in Paris in some detail. At the time of writing, the 18e is a bustling and diverse area, from the *Gare du Nord* in the south where

[53] Itoua-Ndinga, 129.

street vendors sell anything you want, to the street markets of Château Rouge which sell imported vegetables, fresh fish and halal meat to people coming from all over Paris. While working on *Le Roman des Immigrés*, I walked several times in the area to understand some of the physical realities behind the novelistic descriptions. The 18e is already undergoing a visible shift from an area where migrants *live* to a place they visit to buy African or Asian food and goods, as rents in the area rise and symptoms of gentrified re-use become visible.

The 18e *arrondissement* has parallels in Brick Lane in London, an area which has seen successive groups of migrants move in and then gradually disperse for centuries. While Brick Lane is now often described in terms of its high Bangladeshi and Bangladeshi-origin population and the famous curry houses that some of them run, both in fiction and in media reports on the area, it is important again to see the use of public space in the area as rapidly evolving, and therefore unstable. In Syed Manzarul Islam's collection of short stories, *The Mapmaker of Spitalfields*, the Bangladeshi community of the 1990s gather in Brick Lane cafés as a site of community building, which (although male-dominated) reflects a sense of ownership, by the local Bangladeshi population, over the space.

> It was Friday afternoon and we were at the Sonar Bangla café. There was a long queue, but that didn't surprise us. [...]Between gossiping about the playback song numbers and the dance routines in the latest videos, and between humdrum news from faraway home and savouring the spicy delicacies on offer, they drifted into another world.[54]

If this fictional scene is to be situated not only in space but in time, it demonstrates a significant change from the Brick Lane of the 1950s and 60s, in which Bangladeshi people were just beginning to settle in significant numbers, described in *Lovers and Strangers*, Clair Wills' historical overview of twentieth century migration to the UK.

[54] Syed Manzoorul Islam, *The Mapmakers of Spitalfields* (Peepal Tree, 1997), 59.

> Milk, tea, sandwiches, fish and chips: the enterprising men who were making a profit on sub-letting rooms used their money to open shops and cafés, which catered for the local population as much as for immigrants. In time many of the cafés would rebrand themselves as curry houses, as their owners slowly introduced Sylheti dishes alongside the fish and chips.[55]

A picture of shifting kinds of migrant occupation of the space emerges over time, until Brick Lane's reputation as a Bangladeshi area enters a wider understanding of the area across London and the UK, but arguably the same people who relaxed at the 'Sonar Bangla café' are now called upon to perform the Bangladeshi-ness, a more general otherness, and 'migritude' of their street for a wider audience and for commercial purposes. Monica Ali focuses on some of the stereotypes of millennial Brick Lane in her eponymous novel:

> She walked down Brick Lane to get to the tube station at Whitechapel. Days of the Raj restaurant had a new statue in the window: Ganesh seated against a rising sun, his trunk curling playfully on his breast. [...] 'Hindus?' said Nazneen when the trend first started. [...]'Not Hindus. Marketing. Biggest god of all.'[56]

But this flux in migrant ownership can also be displaced by wider forces. Rachel Lichtenstein traces the changing area from its previous incarnation as a Jewish area, demonstrating how an area like this - like Termini or Trastevere in Rome, like the 18e or the 13e or Belleville in Paris, and like Kings Cross and the Edgware Road in London - can experience rapid displacement where there is money to be made.

> Brick Lane disappeared behind a wall of scaffolding and once-empty shops re-emerged as coffee bars, estate agents and smart new galleries. Pavements were dug up and replaced with fake cobblestones. Leather manufacturers became vintage clothing stores [...][57]

It's important to consider this temporality within the narrator in *Le Roman des Immigrés*' Paris. The seemingly documentary and observational portraits of 'migrant areas' paint a

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[55] Clair Wills, *Lovers and Strangers: An Immigrant History of Post-War Britain* (Penguin UK, 2017), 86.
[56] Ali, *Brick Lane*, 446.
[57] Rachel Lichtenstein, *On Brick Lane* (Penguin UK, 2008), 9; Iain Sinclair and Rachel Lichtenstein, *Rodinsky's Room* (Granta Books, 2014).

picture in time and space: the ownership freshly witnessed by the narrator may itself prove to be transient and temporary, and the 18e *arrondissement*, like Brick Lane, may build up layers of migrant memory even as settled migrants move on to other parts of town.

From Discovery to Ownership: Geneviève in *Le Roman des Immigrés*

The narrator's voice in *Le Roman des Immigrés* recounts multiple different migration stories, more or less successful; each presented as having been relayed to him through the Paris migrant community grapevine. The story of 'Geneviève' is the longest and one of the most disturbing in a collection that includes modern slavery, corruption, sexual exploitation and so on.[58] Geneviève is a compatriot of Gabriel and the narrator from Congo (Brazzaville) and her story, told by Gabriel, comes second or third-hand:

> "The Black Cow", that's the name that the immigrants of Château-Rouge had awarded to Geneviève. All the eighteenth *arrondissement* immigrants from *our Africas* knew her story in detail, the story that they told and retold in the *matangas*, in the *ngandas* and in other similar places. [59] Geneviève with the wide eyes, with the appetising lips, with the well-made hips, with the sensual bosom and the flat stomach, had stopped frequenting African areas because she couldn't shed off the story which followed her around. She was no longer seen at Château-Rouge, at Barbès-Rochechouart or even at the Gare du Nord: she was completely cut off from the rest of the world. Not even the shadow of her shadow could be glimpsed in the Tati department stores, in the flea markets of Argenteuil, of Montreuil, of the Porte de Clignancourt, of Sarcelles, or even in the fast-food joints of the eighteenth *arrondissement* of Paris: McDonalds, Quick, KFC, and the many others. [60]

A network of gossip and storytelling is evoked which is not particularly benign towards Geneviève: '[S]he left behind her the almost inaudible whisperings of mean women, and evening gatherings lifted by the spice of mocking laughter. These women, clumsily snobbish

[58] Itoua-Ndinga, *Le roman des immigrés*, 9–58.
[59] *matanga*, pl. 'wakes', *nganda*, 'bar/restaurant' in Lingala.
[60] Itoua-Ndinga, *Le roman des immigrés*, 9.

and snooty, couldn't hold off telling each other about it at every opportunity.'[61] Migrant Paris loves to talk about Geneviève. However it is not on her side, and while this feeling of spite is partly explained by Geneviève's beauty, it is also a running theme throughout the novel. A Greek chorus of migrant voices disseminates and analyses events within migrant communities, often highlighting the comparative distance and objectivity performed by the narrator.

Geneviève comes to Paris not as a migrant, but as part of an international delegation. She is a civil servant in Congo (Brazzaville) who is convinced by her Parisian relatives to abscond during a diplomatic trip to the French capital. What follows is an epic journey, in which she repeatedly finds a place to live and work and then loses her position as a result of sexual exploitation; becoming a sex worker in the Porte de la Chapelle area, being mutilated by a dog in a horrifically violent sexual attack, working in a processed food factory in Poitiers, dealing with homelessness, deportation orders and, time and again, the jealousy of her female peers. Geneviève, described as very attractive and repeatedly characterised through her determination and fighting spirit, eventually settles in Poitiers, saved from deportation by marrying Samuel-du-Bois, himself an outcast and an exile from Paris, a homeless man who has little to offer but his French citizenship.

Geneviève's story is a series of adventures in which she is repeatedly the victim of male sexual desire, often combined with violence and racism as well as the unkindness of jealous women. She shares her name with the patron saint of Paris and her pragmatism and

[61] Itoua-Ndinga, 9–10.

persistent optimism calls to mind Voltaire's perpetually ingenuous creation Candide.[62] Moreover, the biographical details of her sexual exploitation resulting in exile echo another pre-revolutionary novel of the Enlightenment, *Manon Lescaut*.[63] Yet despite these indications that her story is part of the larger narrative of Paris, she too retains a sort of enforced 'outsiderness' until her eventual marriage with another outsider, a homeless French man, leads to a kind of happy ending.

While Geneviève's tale eventually leads her several hundred kilometres from the French capital, she is first introduced and then repeatedly referred to as 'Geneviève la Parisienne', her adoptive local identity becoming an important part of her characterisation. In this story, *Le Roman des Immigrés* addresses the question of what makes a Parisian: from the tourist itinerary of the Congolese delegation to a new learning experience in which Geneviève is mentored by her friends and relatives, the gradual accumulation of knowledge of the (migrant areas of) the city, to the experience of being outside and alone and having to make a living without the support of family, an experience which leads seemingly inevitably to sex work.

A close reading is now provided of how Geneviève negotiates this Parisian identity, the contrast between her initial positioning as a visiting African civil servant, her stay with her family in which she is essentially an unpaid domestic worker, to the strategies she employs when she becomes destitute. Taking this 'Parisian identity' as a starting point, it looks at the different ways she negotiates it within different places in Paris and France, and how she is

[62] Voltaire, *Candide ou l'Optimisme*, 1759.
[63] Prevost, Antoine François, *Manon Lescaut*, 1731.

eventually able to take her place within French society. In view of the rumour mill which brings her story to the ears of the novel's narrator via his friend Gabriel, it investigates the separation of the Congolese and African diasporas in the French capital and how it functions in relation to a more mainstream (or principally white) dominant culture.

It rejects any idea of a 'whole' or 'pure' place-based identity, looking instead at identity formation as a process and relationships with space as a strategy to negotiate migration. Even Geneviève's own possession of her French and Parisian identities is mediated by the manner in which the story comes to the narrator: through a chain of whispers and gossip across the African communities of the Île-de-France which renders her position both relative and unconfirmed.

> The minister in charge of her, monsieur Jean-heart-of-Stone, was a man of enormous generosity. Once they arrived in Paris, in the Sofitel hotel right in the heart of the la Défense district, Jean-heart-of-Stone granted all the members of the delegation three days of leave to visit the Eiffel Tower, Concorde, the Pont de l'Alma where Princess Lady Diana perished, the Arc de Triomphe and the Champs-Élysées, the Disneyland theme park in Marne-la-Vallée, the palace of Versailles in Yvelines, in short, all the principle tourist sites of the Île de France, with the exception of the François Mitterand Library, the Georges Pompidou Centre – Beaubourg, Emile Zola's house at Médan or the Vallée-aux-loups, Chateaubriand's House and Lands at Chatenay-Malabry, in the Hauts-de-Seine. […] Like her colleagues, Geneviève was given three days off by monsieur the minister. But unlike some of her colleagues, who didn't know anyone in Paris, Geneviève had an aunt in the Île-de-France, who lived in Saint-Denis, in department 93, the younger sister of her father, whom she rather adorably called tante Bébé.[64]

Geneviève moves rapidly from one version of Paris to another, led by tante Bébé. The list of touristic attractions gives way to new lists: of places which figure in the lives of tante Bébé's family. Her transformation from tourist to *parisienne* is marked by new lists: she will not

[64] Itoua-Ndinga, *Le roman des immigrés*, 11.

visit the Eiffel Tower or Versailles again once she enters tante Bébé's home. She takes a decision to leave the delegation and stay in her aunt's house, and a transformation occurs in her understanding of the city. Only two months later,

> Geneviève possessed an eight-zone *carte orange* with which she could get around the entire transport network of the Île de France; she could leave Saint-Denis to go to Montereau sur Seine et Yonne, from Chessy Marne-la-vallée to Cergy-Pontoise [...] or from Saint-nom-la-Bretèche in Department 78, Yvelines all the way to the 8e *arrondissement* of Paris. Geneviève used public transport night and day: her thirst to get to know France was the deepest feeling that she felt.[65]

As a *parisienne*, Geneviève is able to cross the city, to enjoy the freedom of a travelcard, and she learns the migrant city as a consumer and a participant.

However, living with her aunt and her husband and children is not a liberating experience. Rather, Geneviève is obliged to spend more and more time at home, cooking, cleaning and looking after her aunt's children. 'After Geneviève's arrival, tante Bébé was seen less and less around the home and passed most of her days with her friend Suzie: she went on a trip to Belgium for a week, to Spain and Italy, and spent more time in the women's *mozikis* [social centres] than at home with her family.'[66] This shift means that Geneviève is frequently at home with Bébé's husband Salomon, who is off work on medical grounds, and quickly begins to pursue and harass her sexually, until she begins an affair with him. Now the scene has changed completely to a limited domestic scene: 'Geneviève looked after the children, took them to school, took care of preparing dinner and also did that thing, with Salomon.'[67] When Bébé finds out about their affair she leaves, taking the children with her, and for a short time Geneviève's Paris is limited to the flat in which she cooks for Salomon

[65] Itoua-Ndinga, 19–20.
[66] Itoua-Ndinga, 20.
[67] Itoua-Ndinga, 22.

out of the freezer and waits on him: 'Geneviève would give him a nice lemony shower, then pass him his toothbrush already charged with mint flavoured toothpaste, and anoint his breast with shea oil made by the Mbororo nomads of Cameroon.'[68] This is the start of a long period of living to serve men, and of struggling to make a living, for Geneviève the beautiful. It is not long before the bills are overdue, the money runs out and Salomon leaves her.

'Some weeks after her departure from Saint-Denis, Geneviève was spotted at Paris Porte de la Chapelle. But what was she doing at Porte de la Chapelle? Walking the street!'[69] Once again, Geneviève's story is mediated through the gossiping voices of migrant Paris. As she turns to sex work, with little hope now of regularising her immigration status - 'Geneviève would have neither bank account nor health insurance, no identity card to present to any employer; all that she had was her beauty.'[70] Geneviève's situation worsens steadily until, after a violent sexual attack, she leaves Paris for the provinces where she will not be recognised. Even while recovering in hospital, 'the Caribbean nurse had washed her hands of patient confidentiality', word of Geneviève's intimate and humiliating injuries cross the city. 'From Saint-Denis, the rumours of this shameful story reached the Gare du Nord where our African immigrants gather every day. From the Gare du Nord to Château-Rouge is just a step. The cries of amazement from the African immigrants of Château-Rouge were heard as far away as Barbès-Rochechouart.'[71] The novel charts the rumour mill that crosses Paris over and again, evoking the different groups of migrants and their diverse meeting places across the city: the same groups that the novel's narrator observes on his trips as a

[68] Itoua-Ndinga, 24.
[69] Itoua-Ndinga, 25.
[70] Itoua-Ndinga, 26.
[71] Itoua-Ndinga, 33.

'reporteur'. Even when Geneviève leaves Paris for Poitiers, this network of migrant gossips continues to discuss her situation.

While the narrator of *Le Roman des Immigrés* is a seemingly external observer of the city, Geneviève is herself watched by a network of fellow migrants, and the novel highlights the absolute lack of anonymity in which she lives, even after her return to Paris under happier circumstances, married to a Frenchman who also enables her to regularise her migration status and gain French citizenship. Again the gossip is based on a kind of jealousy: 'All over, it was said that Geneviève was nothing but a black cow, "the woman who rips off a homeless man to get her papers."'[72] The rumour mill itself maps the city of Paris and cannot be escaped by moving or by integration into a world where migrants do not go: the city tells and retells her story until it is inscribed into the myth of 'migrant Paris'.

Spaces of Community, Spaces of Freedom: the 'Commander of the River'

Cristina Ali Farah's 2014 novel *Il Comandante del Fiume*[73] (The Commander of the River) describes the efforts of Yabar, the young Somali-Italian protagonist, who has grown up in Rome at a distance from the Somali refugee community, to negotiate his identity on his own terms within and against the parameters set by three distinct social groups.

The seventeen-year-old Yabar is frustrated by the members of his household, by the casual racism he experiences, and by the mystery which surrounds his wider family across a Somali diaspora. Struggling to connect with his overwhelmingly white Italian classmates, he

[72] Itoua-Ndinga, 57.
[73] Ali, *Il comandante del fiume*.

becomes friendly with a group of young black people, many of whom have grown up in the care system, who gather in a Rome square in which their social experience combines a sense of liberation with exclusion demonstrated by the white Roman majority. Yabar also travels to London where he finds the Somali community to be strongly-knit and more established, although he encounters divisions and conflict between the younger and older generations. The novel charts the ways in which he reconciles the black, Italian and Somali aspects of his identity, mapped against London and Rome as his journey of self-discovery leads him out of domestic space and into the city. It examines how, despite the pressures experienced by Yabar, different ways in which a community can claim ownership of public space can mean collective liberation and strength. Throughout the *bildungsroman,* Yabar is pulled in multiple directions and so a main focus of this section will be on how the urban backdrop, in London and Rome, contextualises his crisis of identity while also offering multiple and varied possibilities of resolution for the young man.

As well as the two different 'communities' in which Yabar is able to express different parts of his identity, the novel evokes a varied, exciting and sometimes dangerous urban environment in which he suffers from conflict with (white) schoolmates, racism from the police, from bouncers and from other strangers, and a road accident which leaves him nearly blind. In contrast to this, the river Tiber (and implicitly the Thames) becomes a universal which symbolically connects different parts of his life, providing a space of liberation and creative potential for Yabar and his peers. The second half of this chapter, therefore, focuses specifically on green spaces, parks and the river as places where an alternative relationship between migrant and city is possible. While closely following the complex and allusive literary techniques which interweave the river Tiber with Yabar's story,

it also seeks to identify how open space and wild areas in the city are used to provide a restorative atmosphere for the young man, and how, beyond the fluvial symbolism identified by Nora Moll, the river becomes an alternative perspective into city life.[74] To conclude this section, some context is offered on the use of green spaces, parks and the river as spaces of liberation within the migrant novel more widely, in which an alternative relationship between the migrant and the city is possible, and it is partially possible to escape systems of social control.

Cristina Ubah Ali Farah: Writing the Young Somali-Italian Experience

Somali-Italian author Cristina Ubah Ali Farah's second novel, published in 2014, is set around ten years earlier than that, at a time when Somali refugees in Europe were hoping that the lengthy civil conflict in Somalia was coming to an end. It is worth reporting the somewhat complicated plot in detail, because the shifts in mode, with much of the plot recounted in analepsis through Yabar's memories, and the shifts in location from Rome to London and back again render a coming-of-age story temporally and thematically complex. The focalisation through Yabar in the naive and earnest voice of an angry Italian adolescent tends to lightly mask the deeper themes of the novel, which functions through comparison; between Somali and Italian culture, storytelling and family structures, between the diasporic communities of London and Rome, and between Yabar and his peers of different backgrounds and identities. Farah's first novel *Madre piccola* (Little Mother) is discussed in the following chapter: in both novels the blended cultural practices of modern migrants are

[74] Nora Moll, "La Roma della diaspora somala: i grovigli spaziali ed identitari della narrativa di Cristina Ali Farah - The Somali Diaspora within Rome: Entanglements of Space and Identity in Cristina Ali Farah's novels," *Il Capitale Culturale. Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage* 0, no. 16 (December 10, 2017): 149–67, https://doi.org/10.13138/2039-2362/1531.

presented matter-of-factly and the literary field of the novel references the Italian literary canon as well as Somali oral story-telling.

> I learned to love the oral, anonymous poetry of the medieval bards, the romancero evoked by García Lorca, Italo Calvino's rewriting of traditional Italian tales, and Pierpaolo Pasolini's striking collection of popular songs and poems. However, my first loves, the texts that influenced me most, were the Somali oral poems and tales, under the wings of which I grew up. I was looking for the oneiric feeling that resonated in the oral poetry, a text disconnected but at the same time coherent, a voice encompassing both colloquial and erudite styles and registers of language. A storytelling that could embody the throbbing power of the voice.[75]

Born in Verona, Farah grew up in Mogadishu until the outbreak of civil war in 1991, and her complex, multi-charactered works apply Somali history and poetry to the contemporary Italian novel, mixing in Somali vocabulary and self-consciously referring to both the contemporary diaspora and a Somali culture with pre-colonial roots, and employing dense, evocative descriptive passages to map the influence of a growing and increasingly rooted Somali diaspora in Rome as well as across Europe and North America.

How Yabar becomes The Commander of the River

Yabar was born in Somalia at around the same time as the outbreak of civil war there, but now lives in Rome with his mother Zahra, and attends high school with his "adoptive sister" Sissi, the daughter of his mother's close friend Zia Rosa (Auntie Rosa); the four of them form a tight family unit. Most of what Yabar understands about the war comes to him from Zahra and Zia Rosa, who discuss it only rarely and in vague, euphemistic terms, and who, as single mothers, tend to stay away from the Somali community in Rome. The two adolescents, therefore, are fascinated when Yabar's mother can be persuaded to open up on the subject.

[75] Claire Jacobson, "Between Two Worlds: An Exclusive Interview with Ubah Cristina Ali Farah - Asymptote Blog," https://www.asymptotejournal.com/blog/2017/05/15/between-two-worlds-an-interview-with-ubah-cristina-ali-farah/. (Accessed June 2, 2019).

> "One thing struck me. When speaking about the civil war, the kids never use the expression "dagaalka sokeeye", almost as though it were shameful to call it that."
> "And what do they say?"
> "Burbur. Literally it means "shattering".[76]

Zia Rosa was also born in Somalia, but as the child of a Italian fascist[77] and a Somali woman who died in childbirth, she was brought to Italy and raised in a very Italian way by her aunt. Her daughter, unlike Yabar, is the estranged child of a white Italian man, albeit one who grew up in West Africa, and was deeply attached to different aspects of African cultures in Rome, seeking out African cuisine and music. Yabar's understanding of Somalia is formed by these two strong, unconventional single mothers, following the mysterious disappearance of his father, who returned to Somalia when Yabar was a child to command a rebel unit.

As the novel opens, Yabar finds himself in hospital, with a serious injury which might leave him blind in one eye. The rest of the novel will gradually disclose the painful journey which has brought him here, which begins with the departure of his father, and culminates with him running in front of a motorbike.

Yabar, about to fail his third year of high school for the second time,[78] has been dealing with mixed feelings about his identity which have led him to quarrel bitterly with Sissi- why should fascism be a taboo for him, he argues, the child of war, the product of fascist colonialism in his country of origin? Sissi, who is herself wrestling with the psychological burden of a fascist father, and constantly attempting to connect with her African heritage

[76] Ali, *Il comandante del fiume*, 163–64.
[77] We assume Zia Rosa's father was in the Italian army in the 1930s but he is generally described simply as 'a fascist'.
[78] High School in Italy is from 14 to 19 years old, and a student must pass each year or sit it again.

(by, for example, asking Rosa and Zahra to tell Somali fables, or painting a mural of Tincaaro, the fabulous Somali queen), disagrees. Yabar begins to regularly do the fascist salute and shout 'Heil' in class, and Sissi is horrified. But as Yabar makes clear, things are different for Sissi- he is black and she is white. 'Sissi and I can't be equal, for a whole range of reasons, but there's one which is more important than the others, and that is that I am black, born of two black parents, while Sissi is white, with golden curls and grey-green eyes.'[79]

As his relationship with his 'sister' falls apart, Yabar begins to make new friends, a group of young black men and women of diverse origins who gather in Piazzale Flaminio. Not only do they accept him and infect him with their sense of fun, inviting him to gatherings and collective street parties (with some disregard for rules and regulations) but they empathise with some of his experiences with which Sissi and his school friends cannot, such as the time he spent in the Children's Home with a very high proportion of children of refugee backgrounds and children of colour. Together, they discuss why one of the group, Bambi, was drawn to terrorism, their experiences of the authorities and of Italian institutions, and the problem of not speaking one's mother's language. This experience of alienation and maternal-filial rupture is vividly illustrated in a scene in a call centre (the call centre is a crucial trope in contemporary literature of migration: see Introduction: Outline of Research above), when Yabar interprets for a friend who wishes to call his mother but does not speak Somali.

[79] Ali, *Il comandante del fiume*, 37.

A Somali-Italian in London

After Yabar fails the school year yet again, his mother sends him to stay in London with her sister's family for the summer. This is the first time she has reached out to her diasporic relatives: usually she keeps a distance from the other Somali people she knows. 'To be honest there is an explanation: Mamma has often told us that, when their children behaved badly, Somalis had the bizarre practice of sending them off to stay with distant relatives.'[80]

In London, Yabar encounters the Somali diaspora in a totally different context. Instead of the tight-knit, woman-centred group which make up his Roman nuclear family, his cousins move in a wide extended circle of Somali, Muslim and other friends and family, based around the mosque and the Somali café and social centre, in which he is surprised to find that people already know his name and that of his father.

Some happy moments come out of this sudden immersion in the Somali diaspora, but Yabar also discovers the family secret that his mother has kept from him for many years. After his father left to fight in the civil war in Somalia, he was responsible for the death of Yabar's uncle, his mother's younger brother. Yabar finds out that the Somalis in his cousins' circle call his own father *Omicidio* (*Homicide*). In a panic, he visits the other Somali social centre, right next to the one he has been frequenting but affiliated with a different group based on the Somali tribal dispute, to find out the truth. Upon learning what had happened and that his mother chose not to tell him that his father murdered his uncle, Yabar flees back to Rome, not sure where he is going.

[80] Ali, 59.

At Rome airport, the already distressed protagonist is pulled aside at security, hassled and racially profiled. The border guards are perhaps acting on his resemblance to the recently arrested Somali-Italian terrorist Bambi, who has also fled from London to Rome after trying to plant a bomb on a London train. Losing his temper in the face of institutional racism, Yabar is briefly detained at the airport, despite his Italian passport. When he finally arrives back in Rome, he seeks solace with a young Cabo-Verdean woman he has recently met, Jessica, who offers him comfort food and affection, but although she looks after him, he runs out of her home and back to the social centre where he first fought with Sissi, 'where all my misadventures began.'[81]

Outraged and exhausted by the new discoveries about his family, by the double standards about Italian fascism both past and present and by the racism he has experienced, Yabar begins once again to do the fascist salute and shout 'Heil!'[82] Vomiting, panicking and trying to run away, he steps out into the street and is hit by a motorbike. Once in hospital, he refuses to describe the causes of his accident, even when the hospital puts pressure on him to file a crime report, simply repeating '"I fell"' and telling the staff he doesn't know what happened: '"I can't remember, doctor, I passed out."'[83]

The novel thus works backwards in series of analepses to uncover the story behind Yabar's accident. Simultaneously it follows Yabar's own uncovering of family secrets, as his world widens to include friends who are Italians of colour, his family in London, and new

[81] Ali, 199.
[82] Ali, 200.
[83] Ali, 11, 15.

understandings of his racialisation within Italian society and the hidden histories behind it. As this rather lengthy summary has shown, Yabar's story brings together multiple diverse experiences of public space in the city, and so this chapter seeks to draw out some of the ways in which the narrative is situated into London and Rome. Firstly it will describe how public space affects his own understanding of his identity, of the wider Somali community, and of his peers both Black and white, arguing that Farah's use of realistic and recognisable sites and her detailed comparisons between London and Rome construct identity *through place*, grounding Yabar within Italy at the same time as it highlights his own sense of dislocation. It then focuses on nature and the wild, with an emphasis on the river: both the legendary river which lends the novel its title and the Tiber, which provides not only a place of restorative calm and relative neutrality for Yabar, but also moments of metaphorical calm and restoration for the reader, in episodes which punctuate the dramatic and complex novel.

A Visible Presence: the Somali Diaspora in London

Yabar has an unusual, racialised positionality in a city which is uncomfortable with its colonial past, a city in which black people such as his friends Ghiorghis and Libaan have to carve out the space they need to exist by themselves. Ghiorghis, for example, was raised in boarding school, his Ethiopian mother a maid. Libaan is of Somali origin but doesn't even know how to pronounce his own name, and can't communicate with his mother in Somalia because they do not share any language. Yabar may have been protected by his mother and adoptive aunt, but in *Il Comandante del Fiume*, this protection gives way to a crisis, a crisis of growing up, a crisis in which his mother cannot keep him from his violent family history.

It is not an accident that the crisis point is reached when Yabar is staying with his aunt, his mother's biological sister, and his cousins in London. In London he discovers that his own father was responsible for the death of his young uncle, his mother's youngest brother. This traumatic killing, during the early years of the civil war in the 1990s, is the reason that his mother sees little of her sister in London and parents in Kenya, choosing instead to centre her life in Rome around (adopted) Zia Rosa.

Yabar's temporary home within London's Somali community becomes a space from which to look at Rome, and at Mogadishu, embodied in the strong presence of the diaspora he has never seen in Rome.

> I had already been in London for a week, but I hadn't yet seen anything of the city. I could have been anywhere - England, Australia, Minnesota - but I felt like I was in Somalia: almost all the shopkeepers were Sikh or Bangladeshi, but there were also call centres, Money Transfer and restaurants run by Somalis, not to mention the people I saw around the area. Veiled women, children of every age, held by the hand or in pushchairs, young people, old people, and they all said hello to each other, like in a small village. [...] And for the first few days, I was very struck to see girls wearing headscarves: I wasn't used to it.[84]

Taken aback by the in-your-face diversity of inner-city London compared to Rome, Yabar is also surprised at the casual way in which his cousins blend their Muslim faith with the other, more playful elements of their lifestyle. On his first night at their home, they take him to the mosque, a diverse mosque attended by Muslim men from around the world, and then on to a nightclub. Yabar, who has rather self-consciously chosen to hold no faith, is amazed as they slip out of their white cotton robes and go dancing. (Perhaps this moment also shows

[84] Ali, 185.

how Muslim masculinity has been missing from his life.) 'That night when we got home, *habaryar* (Auntie) made them swear in Allah's name that they hadn't drunk [alcohol], and both my cousins answered her "wallaahi".' The transgression, and the casual way in which his cousins lie to their mother, while still appearing to be observant and believing Muslims, is a shock to the serious Yabar. 'That's how I found out that Somali kids growing up in England are asked "say wallaahi", because they never stop repeating that word, even when what they swear is false.'[85]

This phenomenon is very much cultural / historical. Twenty-first century Rome *is* a diverse city, well on its way to a 10% migrant population. But it became a host city for mass migration much later, starting from the 1980s, and many of this 10% are white, coming from places such as Albania and Romania. Combined with a high level of racism and a collective amnesia towards Italy's colonial past, this means that ethnic minorities tend to keep a low profile, and while many shops and businesses are run by and cater to 'Italiani Nuovi', there are only a few parts of Rome which could be seen as openly multicultural: Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II, Termini Station, Via Tiburtina and so on.

But the London that Yabar visits is not the only London in the novel. Later Sissi describes her own experience of the city.

> "What did you do in London?"
> "We went to the Tate Modern, the gallery of modern art, can you imagine it used to be a coal-fired power station. It's on the Thames, at South Bank. It's so beautiful there. How I wanted to run along those long banks!"[86]

[85] Ali, 171.
[86] Ali, 157.

In comparing Yabar's experience to Sissi's, the novel reminds us that race- or rather, skin colour and appearance- are key to understanding Yabar's experience, over and above his memories or his personal identity. The London he visits can only be a highly racialised, migrant London, while his 'sister', who feels herself to be Somali, walks into the city as it is displayed to white European tourists. These two experiences of London shed light on how the two young people experience their home city of Rome, whether they like it or not, and go some way to explaining Yabar's anger at Sissi.

In *The Commander of the River*, Ali Farah is representing a world where infinite journeys are possible, where places can resemble other places (Somalia, London, Minnesota) and where a person can dream or change as he or she wishes, yet, crucially, she insists at every point that these comparisons and these choices are not neutral: Yabar goes to London but finds the Somali cafés divided on clan lines, his sister's optimism cannot be shared by her black brother, he cannot leave his blackness behind.

Escape and Freedom: the River

Il Comandante del Fiume opens with two scenes set by the banks of the river Tiber. This section will look at the role played by the river in Yabar's identity and development as a diaspora subject, through the lens of the Somali fable which gives the novel its title. Yabar and the people around him are often found on the banks of the Tiber, which, as this section will argue, takes on three simultaneous but seemingly contradictory roles. Firstly, it is part of Rome itself: a key symbol of the identity of the Eternal City, which is shaped by its bifurcating force, with key districts to be found on either bank. Secondly, it provides an escape from the urban space proper, a green oasis which offers succour to characters under

pressure inside the city. And thirdly, the Tiber takes on a metaphoric role as the river in the story that Aunt Rosa tells Yabar, the river which is simultaneously the only possible source of life, and the source of danger to those who depend on it. In her important essay on the city of Rome in Farah's first and second novels, Nora Moll emphasises the importance of the Tiber in the novel.

> The nerve centre of the city, but also that of Yabar's life, is primarily represented by the river Tiber, which appears as a *leitmotiv* throughout the whole novel, creating, moreover, a strong assonance and a thematic reminder of the river in the Somali fable mentioned above. [...] This time, rather than an outsider viewpoint and a decentred *imaging*, we're witnessing a vision of Rome "from below". [87]

The Tiber curves through Rome from the north to the south-east, reaching the sea twenty-five kilometres from the city centre at Fiumicino. Along each bank run busy main roads, but as in other cities, these descend via flights of stairs to grassy walkways along the stone banks, suitable for jogging or walking, and home to wildlife. Yabar and Sissi live close to the river, and it is present at moments of joy but also of crisis in Yabar's life. Nora Moll draws attention to the use of the river to guide the plot as well as to provide allegorical continuity for Yabar's own development into a man.

> Each stage of Yabar's growth, of his transition from childhood to adolescence and the moment when his whole life is in crisis (due to the accident and to the danger that he will lose his vision in one eye) happens near the river and under its auspices. The fluvial *leitmotiv* which seems itself to carry the protagonist's life forward in its tide, sometimes allows for moments of pause and of reflection, as well as furnishing the background for more significant events.[88]

By analysing the seemingly contradictory roles of dependency and danger embodies for Yabar by the Tiber, and comparing these with the more emancipatory experiences of his 'white sister' Sissi by the river, this section also suggests some of the ways in which the

[87] Moll, "La Roma della diaspora somala," 160–61. [translation mine].
[88] Moll, 162.

enjoyment and freedom of green spaces and nature in the city is complicated by his refugee background and his racialisation as black. Finally it considers the role played by the river for Yabar, both as a symbolic marker and as part of the fabric of the city.

The river figures as an important site of leisure, both for the adolescents in the novel and for the adults around them. The novel is focalised through Yabar's voice, yet when he describes the scene down the step on the riverbank, he displays an aesthetic sensibility that belies the voice of a teenaged boy.

> Noise rumbles beneath the bridge and the river flows more quickly. We like to stop just there where the slope widens and the banks seem like floating flower beds, covered with purple flowers with yellow hearts. In spring, an anonymous gardener even plants primroses there.[89]

There is no other site or type of place described in such terms within *Il comandante del fiume*: the flats Yabar visits, the cousins' home in London, the public square where he meets his friends; all are conveyed with minimum description and brought to life through dialogue and human interaction. The river, conversely, rises above the other places in the novel: it figures both as place and as legend, and its extended fluvial metaphor is constructed to match Yabar's own development into a man.

The novel's title, *The Commander of the River* comes from a Somali folk story, one of many told by Aunt Rosa to Yabar and her daughter Sissi. After a successful mission to find water, the returning wise men find that the new river is infested with crocodiles. Eventually, the people decide to appoint a Commander who will be responsible for protecting the people as they fetch water: the moral of the story explained thus: '"It's not possible to live without

[89] Ali, *Il comandante del fiume*, 32.

water, Yabar. But you can live with crocodiles. The crocodiles are the necessary evil, and it's necessary to learn to manage them."'[90] Yabar's relationship with his absent father can be viewed through this fable: the lasting trauma of the Somali conflict is gradually revealed through the discoveries he makes about his father's role in the family tragedy. The 'commander' of the river offers a way of understanding the war which might move on from trauma to a sense of acceptance that humans will always have to deal with evil.

> My mother smiles and says: "Well observed. The commander of the river is chosen by the people, so we could say that he acts in the communal interest. All the same, we can't be sure that the commander is always able to tell people and crocodiles apart, to tell his own interests from those of the people. Would you be able to?[91]

The Tiber is compared by Yabar to the mythological Somali river (un-named and unlocated) throughout the novel.[92] The themes of the book: Yabar's coming-of-age; his relationship with his (white) sister; his horror at finding out the crime (of fratricide) committed by his father; his quest to find a place where he belongs at the intersections of black, white, Somali expatriate and Italian societies (these four categories which, as shown above, are fluid and evolving in the novel), is set against his identification with the commander in the story, who shares his first name. In the closing words of the novel Yabar is able to find closure on some of these issues, again comparing his own life to the moral tale. Once again, the comparison between the Tiber, emblem of Rome, and the river in the story is highlighted.

> Just there, a few steps away, is the Tiber. There's a solemn feeling about going back down towards the river, neither of us can bring ourselves to speak out loud, but only in whispers. I see a few tree trunks, half-submerged, like the spines of crocodiles. Crocodiles are the necessary evil and to conquer them, a great determination is called for. The commander of the river knows how to distinguish good from evil, he can recognise

[90] Ali, 42.
[91] Ali, 133.
[92] In fact, as Yabar reminds us, Mogadishu, where his family are from, does not have a river, only the sea coast. Ali, 75.

> their spirits. He doesn't betray the faith of the people in him, he doesn't abandon his family, he doesn't kill the innocent. Finally, after all these years, I understand. It's not my father: it's me, Yabar, who is the commander of the river. [93]

The evil below the surface - the crocodiles in the river- have been resituated into the 'natural' fabric of the city of Rome. Yabar's resolutions do not come only from Somali folklore; they are integrated into the city in which he lives. The extended metaphor of flowing water is transplanted onto Rome, in a conclusion marked by Yabar's new sense of responsibility and of control over his own life.

The River: a Site of Freedom, or Exclusion?

Both Yabar and his 'sister' Sissi live close to the river, where Sissi goes running every day after school with her mother Rosa along the bankside path in an important shared ritual for the two women. This path figures as a green space, a place of freedom and possibility for Sissi and her young friends, who spend many of their afternoons under the arches of a bridge there. Sissi, a determined and optimistic young woman, decides one day that the friends should repair and paint an old bench which stands there. Next she decides to paint a mural under the bridge of a figure from Somali mythology, and again she completes the task she has set herself. Here Sissi, confident in her belonging in a manner that comes much less easily to her 'brother', claims ownership over a public site, a place of nature in the heart of the city.

> "What do you think about me painting a mural?" she said one day, picking at the plaster. It was as if she was tidying her own room.
> "What do you want to paint?" one of the boys asked her.
> Sissi showed us a drawing which I already knew almost too well: a woman with spiderwebs in place of her hair.[94]

[93] Ali, 204.
[94] Ali, 33.

'Tincaaro, the Queen of the giants,'[95] is familiar to both the characters from the stories Aunt Rosa has told them, but it is a marker of Sissi's confidence and ownership of the city that she can decide to paint it onto the banks of the Tiber themselves. To Sissi, the leisure spots of Rome echo the intimate spaces which belong to her, such as her bedroom. Comparing Yabar to the refugees from Somalia in *Madre* piccola, Nora Moll suggests that Yabar and his friends, white and Black, 'traverse Rome with the security of "natives"'[96], but while that comparison holds true, Yabar's own relationship with the city is much more fraught and uncertain than it is for the peers that he identifies as 'white', including Sissi. The young people are not *wholly* accepted there but any hostility they experience is a direct result of contravening the rules which govern the space, a straightforward description of adolescent transgression and its generally accepted results:

> On the other side of the river we can see the river-based fire brigade, with their red speedboats, with the gasworks behind and two ancient cranes leaning in front of it. Dressed in yellow and red, sometimes the firefighters would greet us, other times they would get angry: you weren't allowed to come down the bank on a scooter with its motor on.[97]

This feeling of hybrid belonging, taken for granted by Sissi, is not the same for Yabar. In fact, Sissi's easy acceptance of her own identity, as a part-Somali young woman and a 'white' Italian, and her interest in the culture and mythology of Somalia, contrast strongly to his own growing interest in the fascist occupation of Somalia by the Italians and what he sees as the wilful amnesia that accompanies it. Yabar, unlike Sissi, is not permitted to take what he likes from each part of his background. His racialisation and the Italian perception of him as black, as different and as in some way associated with other black people and migrants is imposed on him when he is in public spaces.

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[95] Ali, 33.
[96] Moll, "La Roma della diaspora somala," 160.
[97] Ali, *Il comandante del fiume*, 32.

The river is introduced through the opening chapters as the site of Sissi and her mother Rosa's daily runs. Yabar himself, louche and laidback, is more of a smoker than a runner, distancing himself from this hobby, and the only time they manage to persuade him to accompany them, the run ends with a mishap which puts an end to Rosa's sport. In fact the incident uncovers the double figuration of the Tiber through the novel as both a site of leisure and relaxation, and as a darker place, the artery of the city, in which danger is not always predictable.

When Yabar goes running with Rosa and Sissi at their insistence, he finds the exercise much more difficult than he expected and struggles to keep up. After running daily with her daughter for years, now Aunt Rosa falls and hurts her knee: an episode which connotes the end of innocence for Sissi, who can no longer run with her mother. At that very moment, Aunt Rosa is telling the story of a boy who leaps into the river to save a baby swallow from drowning. Later, as an adult, the same person sees a child fall into the same river "...and doesn't lift a finger."

> "It can't be!"
> "Well, he was grown up, he'd lost his innocence.[98]

Busy with her story, Aunt Rosa falls to the ground 'like a large bird' herself, tripping on a rock 'because she was telling the story so passionately'.[99] As a result, Yabar's introduction into the healthy family ritual becomes the last day Aunt Rosa can run: and the effects are a new alienation between Sissi, Yabar and Rosa. 'However, Sissi changed from that day on: it

[98] Ali, 26.
[99] Ali, 26.

had never occurred to her that sooner or later she would have to run alone.'[100] Yabar, unwilling from the start, is not enthusiastic about chaperoning Sissi in his aunt's place; instead, Sissi develops newly independent behaviour from the setback.

> Sissi went running on her own, with a pepper spray in her pocket. She had bought it on eBay from an American seller, because that kind of spray is illegal in Italy. She always carried it close to her, it was almost like a part of her, like her fingernails or her teeth. [101]

This 'bomboletta' will be the weapon Sissi uses against Yabar when their relationship reaches its lowest point. The incident by the river has served to show she cannot count on anyone and must take care of herself. Through these scenes by the river, situating the young people 'outside' of the pressures of Roman society, the moral message of the novel is established. Danger doesn't come from outside- it is always with us, and implicitly, it follow the migrant wherever s/he may go. Just like the Commander in the fable, one must learn to live with it rather than eliminating it altogether.

The river itself adds anxiety and danger even when Yabar is apparently at ease within Italian society. With the girl he likes, Stella Ricorsi, he looks down at the passing water from under the bridge.

> And that's how, as the rain poured down and we sat there chilled and relaxed, Stella Ricorsi came out with "What do you think would happen if the river suddenly rose. Would we be able to escape?"
> So I began to imagine an enormous mass of water, flowing forward and submerging everything. The river would take possession of the city, conquer its buildings, and so we would disappear under the wave, and become no more than branches in its stream. [102]

[100] Ali, 27.
[101] Ali, 32.
[102] Ali, 34.

Yabar's first date with Stella Ricorsi will take them to the *Ponte Rotto* (the Broken Bridge), the oldest bridge in the city, of which a mere fragment remains stuck in the middle of the flowing water. It is from here that Yabar will realise his own relationship with Stella is based on her pity for him as a troubled teenager and as racially other: she believes she can help him by taking him to a theatre workshop. Upon entering the social centre, Yabar becomes suddenly aware of the racialised 'otherness' of all the participants in the room:

> To me, meanwhile, the picture was becoming more and more clear: among the students there were some with almond eyes; some had curly hair, some had dark skin; there was even one guy who judging by his eyes and his cross must have been a gypsy, so in fact they were all "diverse" in Stella Ricorsi' eyes.[103]

The romantic liaison which he has allowed himself to imagine while they relaxed on the Broken Bridge has been shattered upon leaving the river to rejoin wider society: Yabar discovers that while others attack him for his perceived difference, it is this that attracts Stella to him. The striking, panicked image of a great flood carrying them all away reveals not only the tension and danger he experiences on a daily basis, but also a deep-seated desire to anonymise himself, to efface his difference; to 'disappear under the wave'.

The River as a Site of Crisis

Il Comandante del Fiume opens with Yabar's stream-of-consciousness as he staggers along the embankment of Trastevere, trying to get to the hospital *Fatebenefratelli* on the Isola Tiberina, the smallish island which punctuates Rome's great river in the middle of the city. The ancient but now modernised hospital, run by monks since 1565, figures in the history of Rome as a place of refuge, notably in the 1940s when it offered shelter to Jewish people

[103] Ali, 70.

during the Nazi raids on Rome's Jewish ghetto.[104] Yabar, bleeding and temporarily blinded by a not-yet-revealed accident, stumbles along the banks towards the bridge which leads to Isola Tiberina.

> It's night, it must be gone two in the morning. The moon illuminates the island and provides me with light, resplendent like a ship which has been turned to gold. It seems to climb up over the river and embrace its shining blue waters. The traffic lights aren't working, or maybe I'm mistaken, I can't seem to see properly. [105]

Making his way with difficulty onto the bridge, covered in blood, Yabar falls to the ground. The hospital is only a few paces away.

At this dramatic juncture, the reader has no idea what has brought him there. It is only at the very end of the book that the pieces of the puzzle are completed, and the events revealed which culminate in Yabar stumbling accidentally in front of a motorbike. He runs from the scene, half-blind from his injury, unwilling to discover the fate of the others involved in the collision.

Yet even at this moment of crisis the moon on the water is beautiful.

> Let's hope it rains tonight, I'd like to clean everything, to leave no traces. I can hear the seagulls shrieking, the rapids roaring and whirling, and the river as it crashes against the island.
> Now I'm on the ship, its prow against the sea rocking gently. The moon grows larger and large until it fills the sky.[106]

In the last moments before he loses consciousness, Yabar becomes one with the Tiber and the night itself. The river, which is a *leitmotif* throughout the novel, fills his thoughts, loud and violent. As Moll observes:

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[104] Alessandro Portelli, *The Order Has Been Carried Out: History, Memory, and Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome* (Springer, 2016).
[105] Ali, *Il comandante del fiume*, 9.
[106] Ali, 10.

> In fact the geographic epicentre of the novel is the river Tiber, and specifically the riverside path along which Yabar and his adoptive sister regularly pass. Yabar will see this riverside path again after the accident which leaves him recovering in the "Fatebenefratelli" hospital nearby, on Tiberina Island. The flowing water, which is a maternal element as well as a symbol of the temporal suspension uniting past and present, and the riverbank dwellers, make up the background for a series of key scenes in the personal and cultural growth of the narrator-protagonist.[107]

Identification, Racism and the City

Despite his anger and the violent ways in which he responds to injustice and racism, Yabar is sensitive to the marginalised, the homeless, migrants and those who 'stand out' in the city. Shortly after he receives the difficult personal news that he must repeat his school year, Yabar boards a bus and encounters two African women with a large pot of horrifically smelly food.

> I was still running over those words "held back", written in red next to my name, when a disgusting smell of spices and other concoctions hit my nostrils. I jumped up and saw that it was coming from an enormous pot, all wrapped up in coloured fabric.
> People were keeping their distance - in fact, all around me were empty seats - while at the front of the bus, around the driver, they were packed like sardines.
> The pan stood in the space designated for pushchairs, between the two women who were holding it steady between their calves. The girls were chatting in their language in loud voices - I don't know why people seem to need to shout in these African languages - and they clearly couldn't care less about the people looking askance at them, or maybe they just hadn't noticed.
> I accidentally caught their eyes, and the two women smiled at me.
> Perhaps they were wondering if their food resembled the food that my mother cooks; and the people squeezed like sardines were saying to themselves: Surely that boy speaks the same language as them and eats the same food, and that's how he can stand the stench.[108]

[107] Moll, "La Roma della diaspora somala," 161.
[108] Ali, *Il comandante del fiume*, 43–44.

Yabar identifies with these African women, not because they share a culture, but he believes that both they and the other passengers would perceive that they do. In fact his reaction to the smelly food is as strong as anyone else on the bus, and his internal monologue reflects a distancing scorn about their own lack of self-discipline and propriety: 'I don't know why people seem to need to shout in *these African languages*,' [emphasis added]. The word 'stench' (la puzza) here is important too: in the fable of the Commander of the River, the sidekick 'Puzzolente' (roughly, Stinker) is the one who is responsible for evil entering the river when he washes himself in it and his fleas grow into crocodiles. Yabar unconsciously distances himself from the same things that white Italians do: strong smells, loud voices talking in foreign languages. However Yabar cannot seem to escape this sort of encounter, not only with other people of African descent, but with the outcasts of Roman society more generally. A similarly disturbing (for Yabar) encounter is with a naked homeless white woman, on the Lungotevere Testaccio, another part of the embankment alongside the river.[109]

> I saw a woman appear. Appear is the right word, because it was as if she came out of nowhere. From a distance she was stunning, wearing a blue veil around her like a poncho, the sleeves so wide they blew in the wind like wings. Under the veil she was completely naked[.][110]

The woman's beauty is revealed to be illusory as she approaches Yabar.

> The woman was singing in a sad lament. She seemed to be talking to phantoms, and she pointed at me with a finger. As she gradually neared me, I realised that what I had thought was a necklace was actually a cord around her neck, by which she was pulling a kind of trolley loaded up with carrier bags and sacks. Now that she was right in front of me, I could see that her body was worn out, and stank of piss and filth like all tramps.[111]

[109] 'Lungotevere' means simply 'Along the Tiber'.
[110] Ali, *Il comandante del fiume*, 95.
[111] Ali, 95–96.

Again, Yabar describes the encounter in disgusted terms, othering the woman. But at the same time, he once again makes a gesture towards the Other, rolling her a cigarette instead of moving away. 'More from fear than from kindness, I took out a paper and a pinch of tobacco.'[112] These outcasts Yabar meets do not seem particularly hostile or dangerous: to the contrary they often give signs of connection or recognition to Yabar at times when he is excluded by his family and friends.

At the end of the novel, as he flees the London Somali diaspora and reaches a point of crisis, Yabar experiences a direct clash with Italian border guards at Rome airport. The scene echoes the story of Bambi, the Italian-born would-be terrorist who is able to return to Rome fleeing the scene of his attempted crime in London. It's not clear to what extent the border guards are thinking of Bambi when they racially profile and question Yabar, but Yabar's (Black, Roman) friends have already pointed out how similar the two young men of Somali origin are. Yabar loses his temper and his entry into the country he has lived in all his life (and where he holds citizenship) is delayed, as he is briefly detained.

Farah uses this stark moment, when Yabar is already distressed after finding out the truth about what happened in Somalia, to show the reality of border crossing for a young black man of Somali origin. While Yabar, as an EU citizen, has the perfect right to cross (upon showing a document) from UK into Italy, border crossing is complicated for people who look like him. We see throughout the book that Yabar is fallible, hot-headed and prone to react strongly to perceived injustice. Yet in this case, the border crossing, the injustice is clear-cut; it is less so

[112] Ali, 96.

when it comes to his quarrels with his white 'sister'. 'I could get my Italian passport tattooed across my chest and it still wouldn't stop them from taking me to pieces, the language I speak on one side, my hands and eyes on the other.'[113]

This leads to the next point which is the institutional, political, social and verbal borders which proliferate in Yabar's life. By contrast, his 'white' sister seems to have a much easier time of it. Yabar is able to compare himself to her at every step: they attend the same school even though the subjects there hold little interest for Yabar, and after he fails a year he ends up in the same class as her too. Although she also has Somali ancestry and cultural heritage, Sissi is a 'white' reflection of what is happening to Yabar, and the difference is stark: this is how Italian society racialises a young black man.

Conclusion: Contested, Claimed and Bordered Space

This chapter has used its two main case studies to unpeel layers of experience of public space. While there is certainly some cause for optimism, the story is largely one of unequal contest for the use, and possession, of public space, and the overriding narrative behind the ways the protagonists occupy urban public space is the twenty-first century narrative of the proliferation of borders.[114] All three novels contain at least one scene of direct interaction with European border authorities and immigration control at a point of entry into a European state. Yet these do not become the primary descriptions of borders within the

[113] Ali, 189.
[114] Sandro Mezzadra, "The Proliferation of Borders and the Right to Escape," in *The Irregularization of Migration in Contemporary Europe: Detention, Deportation, Drowning*, 2015, 121–35, https://researchdirect.westernsydney.edu.au/islandora/object/uws%3A36298/; Mezzadra and Neilson, *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor*.

texts; they are wholly overshadowed by the ways in which streets, squares, housing, access to work, public transport and even social interaction are marked by bordering. The protagonists, each have a completely different migration status (one is a visiting reporter, one an asylum seeker, one a Somali-Italian with Italian citizenship) yet in public space their experiences of bordering and the strategies they employ to contest them play out in markedly similar ways. As Toivanen says:

> At the less glamorous end of contemporary African mobilities, one can observe travellers who have practically nothing in common with Selasi's (2005) "Africans of the world". The world is far from being "open" to them, and the borders that "Afropolitans" cross effortlessly, represent insurmountable barriers for these underprivileged travellers; the abject in-between states of refugees or undocumented migrants are a case in point.[115]

But one of the aims of this chapter is to uncover how crude and racist the execution of the proliferation of borders is: the 'Afropolitan' may find that they are able to cross international border check-points easily, supported in so doing by money, social class and cultural capital, but if they walk the streets of Brixton or Barbès-Rochechouart, they are more likely than a person who appears white to be stopped by the police, racialised by a stranger or denied full access to public goods. The chapter has placed these two themes side by side: the importance of migrant bodies in the ways in which public space and borders are policed and the *situatedness* of strategies toward increasing migrant's sense of ownership of urban public space. It compared how the protagonists' own bodies are controlled and policed in the European urban environment, as well as the strategies they employ to resist everyday bordering, oppression and the hierarchisation of the host society above their country of origin.

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[115] Anna-Leena Toivanen, "Failing Border Crossings and Cosmopolitanism in Brian Chikwava's *Harare North*," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, September 3, 2018, 2, https://doi.org/10.1177/0021989418794743.

Chapter 2: Encounters in public space: Conflict and Connection

Introduction

This chapter, like the preceding one, creates a conceptual map of the 'migrant city' in light of its representation in the novel. However, chapter one focused on space in the city both as described within the novel, and through the symbolic uses attached to different kinds of space within fiction. This chapter adopts a different perspective, charting the 'migrant city' through fictional encounters: encounters between migrants, between strangers, and, lastly, encounters in which othering leads to conflict.

While the first chapter provides detailed close readings of two novels with reference to public space, this chapter offers an overview of different encounters in several novels, moving conceptually from the margins to the centre of the city: from more familiar encounters, to meetings with strangers, and finally to conflictual encounters. A new map develops, one of uncharted, dangerous areas and well-trodden daily routes; of local knowledges, support networks, and social exclusion.

In so doing, it echoes migrant journeys by underground train, bus and on foot, reflecting on public transport as a very unique kind of public space: both policed and liberating, moving yet fixed. Public transport offers a stage for different kinds of covert and overt observation and encounters between very different people, acting as a platform for positive meetings and mutual recognition between migrants moving around the city. Meanwhile, these novelistic encounters on public transport are very much grounded in the everyday, revealing

the quotidian patterns of journeys and constructing a tension between the commonplace and the extraordinary, a tension which takes in conflict, marginalisation and struggle.[1]

It considers the social and material factors which make the same journeys different for different agents, and tries to show the ways in which urban space is socially constructed through contact and acts of communication. It also considers conflictual encounters as a symptom of struggles of identity and ownership played out across the migrant city. Public transport is both organised and chaotic, democratic in the sense that it is accessible to everyone (even more so than other public spaces in the city) yet often marks social class in ways that are clearly codified in the three cities. Romans are more likely to drive and own a car.[2] Parisians who use the RER or suburban overground rail lines may be associated with social mobility due to the concentric hierarchisation of the greater city.[3] In London taking the bus where tube or train is available has sometimes been associated with poverty. Furthermore public transport has its own sets of rules in each of these locations, from buying a ticket to interactions with other passengers, and these rules are often important in novels which discuss marginalisation from mainstream society, social issues such as status, and meeting points with multicultural potentials. In considering how migrant bodies move around the city as both an everyday action and a continuation of the migrant journey, this chapter presents migrant interactions and sightings within public transport, showing how

[1] Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*; Stanley Cohen and Laurie Taylor, *Escape Attempts: The Theory and Practice of Resistance in Everyday Life* (Routledge, 2003).
[2] Gaita, Luisiana, "Trasporto pubblico, in Italia il disastro della mobilità sostenibile: aumentano gli spostamenti in auto, Roma maglia nera," Il Fatto Quotidiano, July 12, 2017, http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2017/07/12/trasporto-pubblico-in-italia-il-disastro-della-mobilita-sostenibile-aumentano-gli-spostamenti-in-auto-roma-maglia-nera/3725223/.
[3] France, Institut National de la Statistique, and et des Etudes Economiques, "Les Franciliens utilisent autant les transports en commun que la voiture pour se rendre au travail," 2011, www.insee.fr/ile-de-france.

moments of recognition or the mutual gaze between strangers is a prominent and pronounced motif arising on public transport across the whole corpus. It investigates how characters are situated inside and outside of urban centres, experiencing sites of contact and conflict between locals, migrants, different people, and redrawing the arteries and important sites of the city.

An important conceptual framework for this investigation is the 'contact zone', defined by Mary Louise Pratt as 'social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power.'[4] Pratt's important theoretical contribution, which analyses the direction of the gaze exchanged between coloniser and colonised, is shifted here to the cities which were once themselves colonial centres. How is the gaze of the *othered* itself a disruption of *otherness*? As Graham Huggan observes,

> This 'contact zone' (Pratt) has arguably expanded with the more recent shift to *trans*national models of cultural studies, in which the prefix 'trans' is less indicative of a movement *across* pre-constituted national boundaries than of an attempt to conceptualize *beyond* the idea of the nation and the corresponding ideology of the nation-state that it has historically legitimized and maintained.[5]

The contact zones explored in this chapter, modelled at the scale of the global city rather than the nation state, reveal not only the small everyday processes by which migrant agents create bonds of solidarity and resist othering, but how affinities and identification between migrants of different backgrounds can even act as celebrations of the new diversity of European cities. In Gloria Anzaldua's seminal blend of theory and poetry, *Borderlands*, she

[4] Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," 3.
[5] Graham Huggan, *Interdisciplinary Measures: Literature and the Future of Postcolonial Studies* (Liverpool University Press, 2008), 3.

configures the 'chicana', a person of Mexican origin living in the USA, as someone with mixed identity, a *mestiza*.

> Don't give me your lukewarm gods. What I want is an accounting with all three cultures - white, Mexican, Indian. [...] And if going home is denied me then I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new culture - *una cultura mestiza* - with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar and my own feminist architecture.[6]

Anzaldua describes the different forces which act on the mestiza and suggests that the solution for negotiating them is 'flexibility'.

> The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity… She learns to juggle cultures… Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else.[7]

This 'flexibility' is also considered here in the context of the migrant's negotiation of the wider city.

Public Transport: Structuring the City

John Clement Ball's *Imagining London* uses a complex set of markers; by country of origin, by district, and by time period, to organise his analyses of literature of migration over the last half century.

> My chapter titles (e.g. London North-West) are designed, through their compass-point and postal-district echoes, to playfully reinforce the global multi-dimensionality of these migrants' Londons and their key identities. At the same time, they indicate the direction from which each chapter's protagonists have typically travelled and to which their homing instincts collectively point.[8]

Ball's structure, which matches compass points with the countries of origin of the various communities (Canadian, South Asian, and so on.) about which he writes, is presented simply as a 'playful' method of organising a complex postcolonial and international metropolis.

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[6] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* (Aunt Lute Books, 1999), 44.
[7] Anzaldúa, 101.
[8] John Clement Ball, *Imagining London: Postcolonial Fiction and the Transnational Metropolis* (University of Toronto Press, 2006), 38.

However, there are certainly parts of the city associated with one community or national group: no London reader could fail to guess who is to be described in novels such as *Brick Lane* or *East of Acre Lane*. Too often, those who were marginalised in their countries of origin remain marginalised. Diverse areas and communities in the inner city and the suburbs remain locked into power and wealth imbalances with the centre, striving for autonomy yet practically unequal. Important dividing lines, both notional and physical, can be observed: the TfL zones, the M25. Paris and Rome are differently organised, yet in both cases the city can be mapped in ways which correlate directly to migration patterns. For example, the ring-roads of all three cities are borders in several senses: a recent documentary about Rome's GRA[9] is a study into different kinds of marginalisation on this border between urban sprawl and semi-rural suburbia. [10] In Paris the *banlieues* have their own art forms, their own fiction and their own urban myths; in fact the divisions illustrated (but also imposed) by departmental borders[11] and under-served mainline rail systems have led to a criticism of the tendency to pigeonhole writing by Parisians of colour as *écriture banlieue*.[12]

Public transport bridges this gap and crosses these borders, performing a sort of equalising role in some cases: emphasising and exaggerating difference in others. Thus this chapter expands on Ball's geo-literary mapping, by investigating the main networks which connect the

[9] Grande Raccordo Anulare, the ring-road around metropolitan Rome.
[10] Gianfranco Rosi, *Sacro GRA*, Documentary, 2013.
[11] The city of Paris has departmental number 75 yet the urban conglomeration takes in 92, 93 and 94 and the banlieues extend well into 91 and 95. While only 2,241,346 people live within the administrative *boundaries* of Paris, the Île de France is the biggest urban area in Europe at between 10 and 12 million.
[12] See Literature Review.

> similar-but-different cities portrayed in the dozens of London novels that reflect a diverse mix of regional preoccupations, cultural influences, personal experiences and postcolonial sensibilities.[13]

Transport, internal travel and other shared functional public spaces provide a permeable plane of contact with the 'similar-but-different' cities. This plane can be observed as a border as well as a mirror, a point of contact and a force of alienation and isolation. In several of the works the 'normality' of bus and train journeys is subverted and questioned, with simple trips becoming obstacle courses or painful odysseys which challenge the city's self-narrative as formed by its institutions. Never 'neutral', the bus or train journey provide a middle space outside of the direct power fields of home, work or other institutions.

Similarly to Clement Ball's *Imagining London*, this chapter is playfully structured around an imagined map of the European capital city, and attempts to chart encounters along two axes: from the peripheries to the centre, and simultaneously from the known to the unknown.

Thus it begins by discussing encounters in public space in a very local context in Leila Sebbar's *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square* (*Fatima, or the Algerian Women in the Yard*), which depicts daily life for Algerian migrants living in the notorious *Cité des 4000* (Estate of 4,000) in the Parisian banlieues.[14] From this, it widens the scene to discuss the complex network of journeys around London effected by the narrator of *Harare North*, the novel by

[13] Ball, *Imagining London*, 39.
[14] Leïla Sebbar, *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square* (Tunis: Editions Elyzad, 2010) [translations mine]; David Garbin and Gareth Millington, "Territorial Stigma and the Politics of Resistance in a Parisian Banlieue: La Courneuve and Beyond," *Urban Studies* 49, no. 10 (August 1, 2012): 2067–83, https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098011422572.

Brian Chikwava about a young Zimbabwean man in London, and his experience of solidarity and hostility.[15]

Secondly, this chapter considers the gaze, which is marked by colonial memory in Somali-Italian author Igiaba Scego's most recent novel *Adua*. Igiaba Scego has become one of the new voices of 'I nuovi Italiani', the 'new Italians', frequently writing in national newspapers and magazines about the experiences of first- and second-generation migrants in Italy.[16]*Adua* traces connections between three generations of Somalis in Italy and discusses how the multidirectional gaze is used to signal inequalities of power and situation.[17] This is also a major concern within *Forest Gate*, the 2009 novel describing the violence and hopelessness of life in inner-city East London by Peter Akinti.[18]

Lastly, it provides a broad survey of encounters and alienation on public transport within Alain Mabanckou's fiction of migration to Paris, looking at *Bleu Blanc Rouge* (1998) which follows a young man from Congo-Brazzaville arriving into the *sans-papiers* communities of Congolese Paris, and one of his more recent novels, *Tais-Toi et Meurs*, which returns to the same themes within the crime genre.[19]

[15] Chikwava, *Harare North*.
[16] Alessandra Coppola, "Nuovi Italiani - Corriere Della Sera," accessed April 7, 2016, http://nuovitaliani.corriere.it/; Flavia Amabile, "Tra i Primi Nuovi Italiani Del 2016 Un Picco Di Figli Di Immigrati," LaStampa.it, accessed April 7, 2016, http://www.lastampa.it/2016/01/03/italia/politica/tra-i-primi-nuovi-italiani-del-un-picco-di-figli-di-immigrati-CvMNUClnreJUHsOvIIsXHK/pagina.html.
[17] Scego, *Adua*.
[18] Akinti, *Forest Gate*.
[19] Alain Mabanckou, *Bleu, blanc, rouge: Roman* (Présence Africaine, 1998); Mabanckou, *Tais-Toi Et Meurs*.

Encounters from the Peripheries to the Centre

Fatima in the "Square"

Over a thirty-five year career, Leila Sebbar has published more than 15 novels, as well as short stories, young adult fiction and memoirs. Some are set in Algeria, but most deal with the experience of exile and migration, life in Paris for North Africans and their children. Her latest novel, *Mon Cher Fils* (*My Dear Son*)[20] turns the trans-Mediterranean journey around, to describe the return home of an older Algerian after a lifetime spent in France. Her works, many of which feature a female, teenage protagonist, return again and again to the themes of disconnection between different generations of migrants, the difficulty of maintaining Algerian and Muslim traditions in Paris, and the deep scars left by French colonialism in North Africa, as well as the traumatic memories of the Algerian War of Independence and the Algerian Civil War throughout the 1990s. (Sebbar's 1996 *La Seine Etait Rouge* is discussed in chapter four.)[21]

In *Fatima ou les Algériennes au Square*, Sebbar sets up themes which will be repeated throughout her fiction: the female viewpoint, the descriptions of daily life for North Africans in the Paris *banlieues*, the conflicts which arise between the first and second generation of North African migrants, and the ambivalent spaces occupied by French Algerians, particularly those born in France. The novel, set in the early 1980s, presents Paris from the perspective of Fatima, a wife and mother who was born in rural Algeria but is raising her children in a tower block in the *Cité des 4000* in Courneuve, Seine-Saint-Denis. Built between 1956 and 1967 as social housing, the Cité des Quatre Mille Lôgements (City of Four

[20] Leïla Sebbar, *Mon cher fils* (Tunis: Editions Elyzad, 2009).
[21] Sebbar, *La Seine Etait Rouge*.

Thousand Homes) was initially used to re-house mainly North African slum and shanty-town dwellers, and became notorious for crime and social problems in the 1980s and 90s. It was used in several films as emblematic of the sprawling estates of the Paris *banlieues*. Seine-Saint-Denis, or French department 93, to the north-east of the city of Paris, is known for its poorer suburbs. The *Cité des 4000* itself came under scrutiny in the 2000s after an eight-year-old boy was killed by a stray bullet, and most of the tower-blocks such as the one Fatima lives in have now been demolished, although the low-rise areas remain.[22]

Most of the local Algerians have moved to France over the previous three decades since the start of the Algerian War of Independence in 1954, to work in Paris factories such as the vast Renault plant on Île Séguin, or in corner shops, Arab cafés, and garages. In the yards (*les squares*) between the tower blocks, Fatima and her friends sit or stand and talk, reproducing the outside social spaces where they used to meet in their rural villages in Algeria.

> They had their corner, and there were so many kids around that the place they had chosen to meet in had been deserted, little by little, first by the Frenchwomen then by the Portuguese and the Spanish women who now assembled elsewhere. If there were no more free benches or chairs, they stood gathered around, they wouldn't walk along the pathways, they preferred to stand in a circle, some knitting, some unravelling and winding old pieces of woollen knitting.[23]

A migrant hierarchy emerges in the *cités*: there is some tension between some of the French residents, longer-established Portuguese, Spanish and Italian migrants, and the Muslim North African communities, who often came as male labourers and brought their families

[22] Françoise Moncomble, "Démolir la cité, une ultime violence ?" *Les Annales de la Recherche Urbaine* 92, no. 1 (2002): 41–47, https://doi.org/10.3406/aru.2002.2455.
[23] Sebbar, *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square*, 73.

later.[24] A collection of stories of Algerian women and the ways in which they negotiate family life in Paris, *Fatima* presents this courtyard in the *cité* as the centre of Paris. It is, however, a contested space. The novel explores the double standards which mean that girls are carefully watched and disciplined to guarantee their modesty (and, by extension, marriageability), while boys and young men go where they like, within the confines of their limited incomes and the pressures of racism and harsh policing. Between the generations are secrets; wives keep their children's behaviours from their husbands, and the three main languages, Kabyle, Arabic and French, act as a block to communication as well as a conduit.

Meanwhile every so often a fight breaks out across the courtyard, often starting as a row between the children sharing the limited playground facilities, before expanding to be taken up by women watching from their balconies:

> The children fought often, and brutally, but they didn't insult each other much. "Dirty Arabs, dirty negros, filthy Arabs, rotter, trash, whore, streetwalker..." Dalila didn't know all these words that the women yelled from window to window, above all one Frenchwoman and a woman from Martinique that the Frenchwoman has originally thought was Algerian, because she had very light skin. [25]

The everyday violence of life in the *cité*, punctuated by 'burglaries, polices raids, fires, rapes in the cellars, bailiffs calling, rival gangs chasing each other, accounts being settled and sometimes even arrests'[26] is discussed, analysed and re-hashed by the talking women, themselves helpless to do more than attempt, constantly, to keep their own children out of trouble.

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[24] Natacha Lillo et al., "Île-de-France. Histoire et mémoire des immigrations depuis 1789," *Hommes & migrations. Revue française de référence sur les dynamiques migratoires*, no. 1278 (March 1, 2009): 18–31, https://doi.org/10.4000/hommesmigrations.209.
[25] Sebbar, *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square*, 75.
[26] Sebbar, 78.

The story of Fatima and her daughter Dalila, and of their family and the North Africans around them can be read as a series of different ways for North African migrants in the *banlieues* to understand the France they live in. Dalila, facing violence from her father every night, plans to run away. Yet after sleepless nights hiding from the family in the bedroom of her younger siblings, she hears him singing in the bathroom every morning as he prepares to go to work in the factory.

> The father's song had woken her up and it was that same morning; perhaps because he was singing in Arabic, the morning after the beating, as though he had forgotten it all, she, she who would never forget, or it was that melody that never changed which rose up in his throat, in the morning, as he shaved, despite himself, the last link with the old country; if one morning, while she remained in the house or when she returned there, she didn't hear that melody, then she would know that her father was dead, or that he was definitively dead to Algeria; it was that morning that she decided to leave the house. [27]

It is typical of Sebbar's writing that small incidents like this are used to show both sides of everyday violence, that the narrative drifts in a seemingly unstructured manner via ellipses and internal frame narratives from the victim to the perpetrator and then on to another, implicated character, showing the network of human relations in which each character is trapped, yet from which they are also able to glean support or strengthened to socially reproduce. The women of the 'square' are not trapped in the Cité des 4000, but it forms the conceptual centre to their imagined Paris. Dalila, the teenaged daughter, born in France, dreams of the day when she will leave her father's flat and the estate. Fatima, her mother, does not, and indeed is thrown into confusion when her visiting cousins wish to visit other parts of Paris.

> As though Algerians from Algeria, especially those from certain regions, had a precise and particular map, made according to their imagining of Paris, the capital of France. [...] When Fatima went for a walk in Paris, she

[27] Sebbar, 25.

> would always imagine this map in her mind, and the women in her family who knew it as well as she did, without ever having left Algeria.[28]

Fatima ou les Algériennes au square presents Paris, for Fatima and her family, as an intimidating place to visit. Their lives on the estate are marked by frequent conflictual encounters, but the thought of the wider city is more easily accessed by visitors from Algeria than by the women whose daily experience of life in France is centred around a single, vast housing estate, and the small spaces carved out by the Algerian neighbours in the yard.

Ventures into the Centre: *Harare North*

Brian Chikwava's dazzling first full-length novel is a complex and experimental book, whose unreliable, even unlikeable narrator is a young man from Zimbabwe, in London for what he hopes will be a short stay.[29] The protagonist of *Harare North* has no intention of staying in London for any longer than it takes to earn four thousand US dollar to pay off corrupt police officers back in Zimbabwe. This unnamed, undocumented narrator is distinguished by his deeply problematic, subjective and unreliable perspective on Zimbabwe and London; and as he struggles to make ends meet in Brixton his whole world view is gradually transformed: by news from home, by multiple, conflicting explanations of the world around him, and by the fundamental dishonesty and hypocrisy of London's treatment of undocumented workers. By the end of the novel the narrator has suffered a breakdown, and the strong parallels drawn between him and his best friend Shingi lead to an implied merging of their characters. *Harare North* concludes with a loss of identity so deep and violent that it seems like death for both Shingi and the narrator.

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[28] Sebbar, 134.
[29] Chikwava, *Harare North*.

Chikwava's work has garnered great critical attention since its publication in 2006, and is frequently configured as part of a movement within young African writing which attempts to turn the postcolonial relationship on its head, or, alternatively, to step out of it altogether.[30] Anna-Leena Toivanen claims that the narrator is the opposite of the 'Afropolitan' figure.[31] However, similarly to Dobrota Pucherová and Irikidzayi Manase's readings of *Harare North*, Toivanen's reading of *Harare North* focuses on the complex figure of an African traveller, with emphasis on the ways he differs from an idealised, imagined 'Afropolitan'. 'Chikwava's underprivileged, abject African traveller comes across as the antithesis of the currently popular figure of the Afropolitan.'[32] Conversely, Marius Kociejowski, in his full-length interview with the author, contextualises the construction of the narrator's character not in Zimbabwe, but in a series of encounters that the author experienced under the large tree in the centre of Brixton, London.

> What is even more alarming is that he is based on someone Chikwava met, one of 'them immigrants that spend time mixing rhythm and politics under the chestnut tree', who was also once part of a killing machine. Brian says, 'You get all sorts of different characters hanging out there. I became curious about those people. I think they go there for different reasons, maybe because they are lonely or because they don't know what to do with themselves at home. They come from all over Africa, all over the world. They spend a lot of time chatting and so I eavesdrop and listen to their conversations, trying to work out what they are about. One day I found myself talking to this Ugandan, a perfectly normal figure, striped

[30] Patricia Noxolo, "Towards an Embodied Securityscape: Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* and the Asylum Seeking Body as Site of Articulation," *Social & Cultural Geography* 15, no. 3 (April 3, 2014): 291–312, https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2014.882397; Dobrota Pucherová, "Forms of Resistance against the African Postcolony in Brian Chikwava's Harare North," *Brno Studies in English* 41, no. 1 (2015): 157–73, https://doi.org/10.5817/BSE2015-1-10; Irikidzayi Manase, "Representations of the Post-2000 Zimbabwean Economic Migrancy in Petina Gappah's *An Elegy for Easterly* and Brian Chikwava's *Harare North*," *Journal of Black Studies* 45, no. 1 (January 2014): 59–76, https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934713517507.

[31] Chielozona Eze, "Rethinking African Culture and Identity: The Afropolitan Model," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 26, no. 2 (May 4, 2014): 234–47, https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2014.894474; Achille Mbembe and Sarah Balakrishnan, "Pan-African Legacies, Afropolitan Futures," *Transition*, no. 120 (2016): 28–37, https://doi.org/10.2979/transition.120.1.04.

[32] Toivanen, "Failing Border Crossings and Cosmopolitanism in Brian Chikwava's *Harare North*," 2.

> shirt, cap, quite handsome, and then he started telling me these stories which were quite incredible, about how he had been in Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda.[33]

Chikwava's young Zimbabwean character has his imaginative origins in another young African from a different country, and it can be argued that the root of the lost young African former soldier are in Brixton, not in Africa. With its detailed use of place names recounted in the narrator's highly individual *argot*, *Harare North* implies an affinity between African migrants in Brixton which has been developed not in Africa but in London. The totality of the novel takes place in London and a large part of it in the South London district of Brixton. Zimbabwe, on the other hand, is described at a remove, through the narrator's unreliable and sometimes clearly untrue memories. The titular *Harare North* refers to London by its associations for Zimbabwean migrants as a key migratory destination with a large Zimbabwean community, revealing a relational configuration of the European city.

While the narrator has come to London only to carry out a practical plan, he is shocked by the ways in which his cousin Paul and his wife Sekai have adapted their sense of the rules of hospitality. The protagonist of *Harare North* gets stuck at the airport when he arrives from Zimbabwe, and has to be picked up by his rather unwelcoming cousin-in-law, who, in the narrator's opinion, does not demonstrate the requisite 'African' generosity.

> I stop helping Paul when Sekai say my shoes is making the carpet in the house dirty. I go out and sit at the doorstep and start to use screwdriver to pick off the mud that have cake under my booties from walking around outside. But Sekai follow me and ask me to look down on our street and tell she if I see anyone sitting on they doorstep? Me I don't get the score what this is all about until she tell me this is not township; I should stop embarrass them and start behaving like I am in England.[34]

[33] Marius Kociejowski, "A Tree Grows in Brixton: Brian Chikwava's Dark Adventure in *Harare North*," *Wasafiri* 26, no. 3 (September 2011): 3, https://doi.org/10.1080/02690055.2011.583763.
[34] Chikwava, *Harare North*, 13–14.

Rather than stay within his cousins' stifling East London home, the narrator turns to the outside world, crossing the city to find his old friend Shingi, looking for work in building sites and a chip shop, and eventually settling in Brixton, where like many other African men he spends time under the great chestnut in the centre of the area.

The square outside the Ritzy in Brixton provides a place to socialise with other Africans which contrasts with the stultifying and even madness inducing atmosphere of his squatted house. However, the novel repeatedly reveals how different parts of the city (from the detention centre in which he briefly stays in the airport to the building site where he finds casual employment) are sites of conflict, between undocumented workers like himself and white Londoners, but also sites where the conflict he left behind in Zimbabwe is played out again and again. 'That old man [...] he is there wearing cap and brown oversized dungarees, blue long-sleeved shirt and old boots. He have reinvent himself complete; you will never think he is Zimbabwean if you don't know him.'[35] In this site where diverse Africans gather to talk, the narrator will eventually experience an important revelation which transforms his own and the reader's understanding of his troubled past in Zimbabwe. In *Harare North*, Brixton plays the part of a city within a city, but it is also a place where Africa and Zimbabwe are geographically present. This experience of a public space in the *receiving city* reflecting the power relations of the *sending place* is common to many of the migrant novels and often reflects a crisis in the main characters' journey.[36]

[35] Chikwava, 127.
[36] Benjamin Zephaniah, *Refugee Boy* (Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2001); Diran Adebayo, *Some Kind Of Black*, (Abacus, 1997); Tchak, *Place des fêtes*; Fatou Diome, *Celles qui attendent* (Paris: 7 Art Editions, 2010).

In *Harare North*, the protagonist sees the militarised hierarchy he has escaped in Zimbabwe reconstructed in the benches in Brixton town centre. As he recognises his former army sergeant Comrade Mhiripiri addressing a mixed crowd: 'them laid-back liars, dog thieves in trenchcoats, pigeons, coarse runaway married men that have develop bad habits like spitting on pavement... all them funny types,'[37] his own position vis-à-vis the apparently public space is clouded by memories of Harare and the army power structures he seeks to escape. As the novel's title implies, Brixton can now be mapped on to Harare from the perspective of the protagonist. The reader quickly becomes aware that Comrade Mhiripiri's status in London has involved a dramatic loss of face and a very real disempowerment. The protagonist's forced recruitment into the army in Zimbabwe is thus mirrored in the Brixton square. For the protagonist, the square becomes a site of conflictual renegotiation of ownership of the city.

> You can see things better here - down Coldharbour Lane, up Acre Lane, down Brixton Road, up Effra Road and up in the sky. But Brixton is a funny place this afternoon. You can just see it when you look around. Them, the street vendors, skunk dealers, the incense vendors, Tube ticket touts, homeless people and thiefs. I don't trust no one here.[38]

The protagonist of *Harare North* moves frequently around other parts of London, seeking to explore, to experience some form of leisure or to simply escape his cramped surroundings. 'Southbank is crawling with them Africans in they colourful ethnic clothes it make you feel like you is not African enough.'[39] However, as a Black African migrant, and one who behaves in increasingly erratic ways throughout the narrative as he becomes increasingly unstable,

[37] Chikwava, *Harare North*, 62.
[38] Chikwava, 139.
[39] Chikwava, 137.

he comes unwillingly into experiences of conflict and exclusion, even within sites which are represented as public for most people such as shopping centres. Shopping streets and touristic destinations are generally perceived as open to all, although they are usually privately owned and employ private systems of policing, and as Sharon Zukin has shown, tend increasingly to encourage certain types of people while presenting a hostile front to others.[40] In Oxford Street, the protagonist is excluded because of his lack of access to money, and due to the ways the shop attendants react to his appearance, with more or less straightforward racism and social snobbery.

> I visit that shop that have the mirror that can make you look tall, beautiful and rich. I go to the basement, with my suitcase, while them shop assistants look at me in that usual London way when them people think you is in the wrong place but don't tell you straight and square. But me I don't care what civilians think.[41]

The seemingly public space reflects a more complex social hierarchisation from the viewpoint of the migrant.

Harare North offers an unusual and original conceptualisation of the European city, in which previously peripheral colonial and postcolonial realities are played out for the young migrant. It's a site of leisure and relaxation, but for him it becomes a place where the fact and fiction that are jumbled in his mind become real and where his past catches up with him. The novel works to conflate the centre and the margins, disrupting the established order of space in a revelatory, modern and politicised way.

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[40] Zukin, *Naked City*.
[41] Chikwava, *Harare North*, 225.

Looking at Each Other

'I looked at people's faces on escalators for a second too long: I hadn't yet become an urban otter.'[42]

People Watching: The City Seen From Forest Gate

This section discusses how marginalised people including migrants can find inspiration and forge connections by journeying outside of the limited areas of the 'migrant city' in which they find themselves. The interplay between the 'ghetto', considered here as a place where marginalised people are asked to live with no choice in the matter, and the wider cosmopolitan city are viewed through the lens of 'contact zones'.[43] *Harare North* and Peter Akinti's first novel *Forest Gate* were the subject of my Masters dissertation, in which I demonstrated that:

> *Forest Gate* is symbolically rooted in the eponymous inner city district in East London, yet its story moves around; now in war-torn Mogadishu, now in a small Cornwall seaside resort, finally in the rural provinces of northern Brazil. The author Peter Akinti creates international parallels: linking the war in Somalia, the racism and drug use of disaffected youth in rural Cornwall and the strength and pride of Black Brazilians constantly back to Forest Gate and its environs.[44]

The novel describes a migrant struggle for autonomy as Meina, a Somali refugee and orphan, explores the dangers and possibilities of London together with James, a British boy of Jamaican origin who was the best friend of her late brother Ashvin. The novel paints a dark picture of the district in which they both live, and the characters make multiple journeys both inside and outside of London before finally finding redemption and a sense of control over their own lives in rural Brazil.[45] James and Meina, who will eventually find a

[42] Taylor, *Londoners*, 2.
[43] Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone."
[44] Grahl, "MA Dissertation."
[45] Akinti, *Forest Gate*, 163.

better life in Brazil, spend their time between the 'safe' interior of Meina's flat and anonymous exterior parts of London: '[We] spent weekends on the canal in Camden where… I painted the market stalls and the canal boats.'[46] Meanwhile Forest Gate itself is associated only with cyclical violence, crime and threat. John McLeod has observed the disjunction within the works of Hanif Kureishi between the stifling suburbs and the ''hip' utopian potential'[47] of trendy London. However unlike Kureishi, Akinti creates an image of an inner city which is beyond salvation: and while Meina and James find temporary respite in Camden and Covent Garden, in the end, there is no way they can find peace in London. For this new generation of migrants in *Forest Gate*, the 'ghetto' is ultimately inescapable.

The London Underground is a domain where to look at the other might be dangerous and must be done furtively, while to meet someone's eyes directly is considered at the least a mark of 'foreignness': that you are not a Londoner, and in the worst case a deliberate, aggressive challenge to a commonly-held social taboo. There is a culture on the London Underground of avoiding directly meeting another person's gaze: it is hard to say if this stems from politeness, shyness or a wider alienation.[48] And yet connections are made on public transport: people do meet, talk and hold one another's gaze. The Foucauldian gaze, a gaze by the powerful onto the powerless, which forces subjection onto the person being looked at, might help explain this behaviour, so widely accepted in London. The looker asserts his power; the looked-upon is changed by the looker's gaze.[49] Thus the simple

[46] Akinti, 104.
[47] McLeod, *Postcolonial London*, 139.
[48] Luciano Gamberini et al., "Passengers' Activities during Short Trips on the London Underground," *Transportation* 40, no. 2 (February 1, 2013): 251–68, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11116-012-9419-4.
[49] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, (London: Penguin, 1991).

question of *who* is looking at *whom* might be revelatory about power relations in the city, provided the data is contextualised within competent generalisations on the social etiquette of that system. In other words, mapping the gaze within public transport journeys provides insight into who holds the power, who challenges it and who is transformed by it.

After Meina, the young Somali asylum seeker who is one of the two protagonists in *Forest Gate*, has been to identify her late brother at the morgue, she takes a journey on the Central Line to a Somali café near Kings Cross. 'I walked around for hours and then I went to Zudzi'.[50]

> I put four pounds on my Oyster card. I hated traveling by tube even before what happened with the terrorists. Being stuck underground with strangers, united by the tugs, rumbles and throws of the Central Line. I hated the way people looked at me, at what I was reading, what shoes I wore. I hated the way I felt I was being appraised by quick sideways glances. I like to imagine people's characters, it has become something of a ritual … I often wondered what people thought they saw when they looked at me.[51]

The passengers 'appraise' each other surreptitiously, yet they are 'united' by the journey. The gaze brings discomfort, yet also an equalising force. During this short journey from East to Central London[52] Meina catalogues and categorises her fellow travellers in the carriage in an internal monologue.

> I counted twenty people packed together, like we were in a sauna with people from all over the world. Twelve of us sat in two neat rows of six. There were eight people standing, trying to look like they didn't want a seat. I heard at least seven different languages; five people had on white earphones; nine were reading the Metro. On the cover was the face of a sixteen-year old black boy who had been stabbed to death that weekend.

[50] Akinti, *Forest Gate*, 57.
[51] Akinti, 57–58.
[52] 20 minutes.

This documentary list of details seems to render the scene as a mundane moment, a snapshot of city life which anybody might experience. However this factual data is juxtaposed with the face of the dead black boy, who gazes from the cover of nine newspapers, an emotive impact which cannot but recall Ashvin's suicide that very day. As Meina looks at the people around her, she imagines their lives, seeking realistic details to combat the anonymity of the train carriage.

> There was a black woman in her thirties... She was a single parent and a bank teller, probably recently born-again, praying fiercely for a drama-free white man to stabilize her life. There was a young African with a sharp new haircut, dreaming of being granted asylum, wearing all the right gear but still not fitting in.[53]

Meina has selected the other black people on the tube, yet despite the imagined intimacy, the scene is one of alienation. The gazes are furtive and the signs of self-absorption: the headphones, the newspapers, and the standing passengers 'trying to look like they didn't want a seat'. Meina, like the others in the carriage, is alone, placed together temporarily with these people by contingency, creating imaginary back stories for anonymous faces she will never see again. And this alienation is rendered even more dramatic when it is immediately juxtaposed with the Zudzi café, a familiar, warm atmosphere where she will be scolded and comforted by Somali women well-known to her and to each other.

A Gaze of Recognition

While Meina's experience on the London Underground is of a one-way gaze, public space is also a place where gazes meet: where two people observe, identify with or even communicate with each other on equal terms.

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[53] Akinti, *Forest Gate*, 58.

On one of James' walks around the City of London, he recognises something in a well-dressed black man he is observing.

> At first he just walked by and they merely eyed each other… James thought he was showing off at first. But then he watched the movements of the man's body, his anxious eyes; the way he would hesitate and begin again; seeming scared, like he knew he was one false move away from the street. James knew he didn't want to live like that.[54]

The novel does not make explicit for whom the man is performing and whether he returns James' gaze. Recognition in this case is fraught with anxiety and implies an element of fear: the possibility of exposure. In contrast to warm, welcoming ethnic communities such as Meina finds in the Somali café, apparently neutral public spaces might hold liberation in the anonymity they offer. As a young Black man in London, James experiences multiple instances of social policing, mistrust and discipline, sometimes communicated only through a gaze.

James and Ashvin are verbally attacked in the Pizza Hut in *Forest Gate* by an older West Indian man in a London Underground uniform; an emblem of an earlier generation of Black Londoners who came to work on the public transport system in the post-war decades. He is reading about the gang-related murder of a black boy in the evening paper and comes over to their table. '"Lickle shits," he said… "You think you want to die. You aren't even ready to shave."'[55] His disciplining intervention is aimed at all the young black boys of London in response to the tragedy. Later in the novel when James and Meina, who is now his

[54] Akinti, 76.
[55] Akinti, 35.

girlfriend, travel on the Great Western train to Cornwall in order to escape the repression and violence of London, James has another encounter with a disapproving older man.

> After twenty minutes, a black man in a blue uniform woke me up asking for tickets.
> "You have them right?" I joked.
> "No," she said, "I gave them all to you." …
> The ticket man didn't find it funny. He took the "out" tickets and punched a hole through them without saying anything.
> Lickle shits.[56]

Both older men are officials of the public transport network and as such represent the power of British institutions: institutions from which James and Ashvin (and to a lesser degree Meina) feel themselves to be alienated. This dual process of disciplining and the recognition reveals the disparity and alienation within groups sometimes presented as homogenous, as well as a generational gap. And in fact *Forest Gate* repeatedly evokes the divisions and splintering between different black British communities, reflecting on intersections of gender and class as well as questioning traditions such as respect for elders among new generations of black British men.

Recognition In Igiaba Scego's Rome

In *Adua*, the eponymous protagonist has found a companion in the elephant statue at the base of the Minerva Obelisk in the Roman square of the same name, and comes to unburden herself of her family stories and domestic tribulations to the listening 'elefantino', in whom she identifies another troubled migrant from Africa, despite the sneers of passers-by.

[56] Akinti, 140.

In Igiaba Scego's *Adua*, public transport also becomes a site of recognition. The protagonist, who left Somalia to follow her dreams of stardom in the early 1970s but ended up making only one eroticised and extremely exoticised film, is therefore differentiated in the novel from the more recent waves of asylum seekers and refugees since the conflict which began in the early 1990s like her young husband, to whom she refers half-jokingly as 'a Titanic, an off-the-boat-at-Lampedusa, a fool'.[57] Despite Adua's long residence in Italy (she is a naturalised Italian citizen) and the way she distinguishes herself from these new migrants, who in return call her 'Vecchia Lira',[58] in public places she is a target of racialized othering. '"Look at the negress, she's talking to herself," say the passers-by, pointing at us.'[59] This double othering is further complicated by the chapters, interposed with Adua's story, which recount her father Zoppe's short stay in Rome under Fascism during the 1930s, when he worked as a translator during the preparation for the Second Italo-Ethiopian War of 1935. He too attracts racist abuse in public, at a time where a black person in the Italian capital was a rare sight.

Both invisible and all too visible in Mussolini's capital, Zoppe encounters a strange family, a 'giant' man hand-in-hand with his little daughter, in the streets of the Prati district one day.

> It was inevitable that they should look at each other that first time. He looked at them and they looked at him. Without that malign curiosity of white people, those hungry hands through his curly hair, those poisonous comments on the colour of his skin. The father and the little girl looked at him with human eyes. [60]

[57] Scego, *Adua*, 28.
[58] Scego, 13. 'Vecchia Lira': 'Old Lira' is a reference to the fact that she was in Italy before the introduction of the Euro.
[59] Scego, 11.
[60] Scego, 16.

A friendship begins, led at first by the precocious little girl who has not developed an awareness of racialised difference, or indeed of reserved behaviour to strangers. But it is only when Zoppe goes to dinner at their flat that he realises that the family is Jewish: the gaze of recognition they first exchange is also of recognition between oppressed minority people, in the steadily worsening atmosphere of fascist Italy.

In multicultural twenty-first century Rome, Adua finds that she stands out in public for a different reason.

> Yesterday I saw a girl on the tram. She was black, with a shaved head and chunky thighs. We were on the 14, coming up to Porta Maggiore. She had been staring at me since Termini Station. Her fixed gaze discomfited me. I wanted to turn around and say, "Basta", to mix my mother-tongue to the language of Dante and make one of those great scenes which brighten our travel across Rome's public transport system. I wanted to be vulgar and over-the-top. A huge scene would have suited me, would have pushed Lul, *Laabo dhegah*, the strange peace in Somalia out of my mind. But the girl was no fool. She approached me slowly and then fired off her question almost without warning. "You're Adua, right? The actress? I saw your film". And then after a studied pause she added: "You know, you really make an impression?"
>
> I was appalled.
>
> My film? Were there really still people who remembered that movie?[61]

Here, and not for the only time within the novel, the recognition is not simply between two people who are similar, but recontextualises Black communities in Rome within the complex set of colonial and post-colonial relations since the first Italian incursions into the Horn of Africa in the 1890s. Adua is usually anonymous in the city, her disastrous starring role in an orientalist art-house sex-film having been absorbed by the masses' ability to forget. Furthermore she believes (wrongly) that the Somali people, such as her father, who might

[61] Scego, 12.

be shocked by seeing it would *not* have had opportunity to do so. And when the girl reveals her knowledge of this forgotten moment in Italian film, with an ambiguous challenge to Adua on the tram - is she admiring? censorious? – we are once again reminded that history finds its own ways of coming back. Adua's strong reaction reveals her complex identity: she wants to 'make a scene' in Italian and Somali, which implies also that despite her long quiet life working in Rome, her melodramatic acting days are also still with her. Once again, public transport offers the perfect stage for a short, impactful scene between two strangers who recognise each other despite their divisions by age and background.

These mutual gazes; of recognition, but not always devoid of aggression, superiority or othering, which take place in the very public areas of trains and tram, reflect a challenge to a binary system of 'us and them', or 'migrant and non-migrant'. In these encounters intersections between race, ethnic origin, residential status, age, gender and class can be explored, and across the fleeting, time-limited space of a short urban journey by bus, tram or train there is space for powerful interactions which challenge fixed identity.

The Disciplinary Gaze: Encounters in Alain Mabanckou's Migrant Paris

Continuing the themes of this chapter, this broad survey of encounters and alienation on public transport within Alain Mabanckou's fiction of migration to Paris looks at *Bleu Blanc Rouge* (1998) which follows a young man from Congo-Brazzaville arriving into the *sans-papiers* communities of Congolese Paris, and one of his more recent novels, *Tais-Toi et Meurs*, which returns to very similar themes within the crime genre.[62] It considers the encounters

[62] Alain Mabanckou, *Bleu, blanc, rouge*; Mabanckou, *Tais-Toi Et Meurs*. [my translations].

and 'contact zones' in the two works with reference to readings of Alain Mabanckou as an 'Afropean' writer, which it defines following Nikki Hitchcott and Dominic Thomas 'in terms of its tentacular potential and latitude, building upon pre-existing categories - such as Francophone African Literatures or Transnational Literature in French - while also extending them into new directions and territories that in turn capture and reflect the longer history of mobility and exchange between France and Europe.'[63] While 'Afropean', as a term, has useful conceptual overlaps with 'migritude' and 'migrancy', it does have its limits within this thesis, which largely rejects exploring a two-way relationship between African and European nations, in favour of a broad, multidirectional network of migratory journeys and relationships.[64]

In both *Tais-Toi et Meurs* and *Bleu Blanc Rouge*, the respective protagonists, Julien Makambo and Massala-Massala, have come to Paris from Congo (Brazzaville) at the behest of more established migrants, and upon arrival discover that these apparently benign men are deeply involved in organised crime in Paris, and expect them to participate in the same to pay back the debt, both emotional and financial, incurred by their migratory journey. The two protagonists are revealed to be naïf, controlled by other people, and even the districts and elements of Paris which they encounter are controlled by others. The protagonists' impressions of the city are therefore heavily mediated - by Moki and Pedro respectively, but also by the police, by institutions, and by their compatriots in similar situations. Mabanckou has been criticised for his negative portrayal of this migrant underworld, yet insists on the

[63] Nicki Hitchcott and Dominic Richard David Thomas, *Francophone Afropean Literatures* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 10–11.
[64] Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (Routledge, 2008); Shailja Patel, *Migritude* (Kaya Production,U.S., 2010).

realism of the situations he describes.[65] As John Patrick Walsh observes, despite the negative portrayal of many of the migrant characters, '[i]n many respects, the withering critique of the order of things on the African continent is a central (and overlooked) piece of the Afropean dimension of his writing.'[66] Kleppinger concurs in her analysis of another migration novel by Mabackou, *Black Bazar*: 'What remains to be explored', as Dominic Thomas suggests, 'is the degree to which these spaces have themselves been reconfigured by African communities and networks, yielding alternative topographies that are increasingly finding a home in the notion of Afropeanism.'[67]

The protagonist of *Bleu Blanc Rouge* finds himself living in a crowded squat with other Congolese men, yet the migrants present a completely different view of their experiences to those back home in Congo (Brazzaville). In *Bleu Blanc Rouge* Massala-Massala is given a letter by his compatriots to copy which has been carefully constructed to show off the wonders of life in the metropolitan capital.

> My dear Marie-Josée
> I'm writing to you looking out at the Montparnasse tower, which I admire every morning from the bathroom of our magnificent flat in the 14th arrondissement. Summer is coming to an end in the most beautiful city in the world. [68]

In fact, Massala-Massala is sharing a tiny squat with several of his compatriots in squalid conditions. While monuments and famous squares are used to represent the power and

[65] Lydie Moudileno, "La fiction de la migration : manipulation des corps et des récits dans Bleu blanc rouge d'Alain Mabanckou," *Présence Africaine* N° 163-164, no. 1 (2001): 182–89.
[66] John Patrick Walsh, "Mapping Afropea: The Translation of Black Paris in the Fiction of Alain Mabanckou," in *Francophone Afropean Literatures*, ed. Nicki Hitchcott and Dominic Richard David Thomas (Oxford University Press, 2014), 107.
[67] Kathryn Kleppinger, "Relighting Star and Bazaars of Voices: Exchange and Dialogue in Léonora Miano's Tels Des Astres Éteints and Alain Mabackou's Black Bazar," in *Francophone Afropean Literatures*, ed. Nicki Hitchcott and Dominic Richard David Thomas (Oxford University Press, 2014), 110.
[68] Mabanckou, *Bleu, blanc, rouge*, 133.

glory of the city, often as over-determined reflections of an erstwhile empire, these representations are rarely straightforward and often, as in Massala-Massala's letter, simultaneously undermine presentations of the city as glorious, beautiful or accessible.

The physical sites, in constant flux under myriad influences, are a direct challenge to the apparently unchanging images of the imperial metropolis disseminated across the world. These new visions of the famous exterior places can have a liberating or even radical effect:

> London potentially interfered with the reception and perpetuation of images of England… ultimately making the city a dangerous and subversive location where revision, resistance and postcolonial critique could be purposefully entertained. [69]

The way the city is imagined by newly arrived migrants might be no more 'accurate' than how it is imagined by people in other countries, yet the permanence of these well-known monuments can be challenged in each individual description.

For Massala-Massala, the Paris public transport system becomes his place of work and ultimately his downfall. In the climactic section of the novel, Massala-Massala, alias Marcel Bonaventure, now using the chequebook and forged identity card of someone called Eric Jocelyn-George, is made to go to every ticket office across the whole of Métro line 4 to buy travel-cards with the stolen cheques. He owes this to his Congolese mentor, Moki, and Moki's shadowy associate, Préfet, who runs various different criminal scams across the city of Paris.

Massala-Massala's journey along Line 4 forms a north-south axis across the very centre of Paris, and thus remaps the city centre. The aim of the journey is not to travel, but to

[69] McLeod, *Postcolonial London*, 92.

maximise the number of cheques which can be cashed by covering the most possible ground in a short time. Thus the transport network loses its familiarity and takes on a new, productive role. On the way, he is shadowed by the nervous Préfet, who briefs him in the first Métro station, Alésia.

> "Listen up, *débarqué*, have you ever anticipated anything in your life? Otherwise, open your ears. Line number 4 goes from Porte d'Orléans to Porte de Clignancourt and includes twenty-six subway stations. OK? It's simple. We have to cancel one out to make the exact number of a checkbook: twenty-five. If we make one round-trip, the sum will be correct: fifty stops, fifty checks. That's phase one."[70]

Préfet is a strange man: his perspective on the Paris Métro is also strange. Préfet is essentially scolding Massala-Massala for not seeing the transport system 'mathematically' as he does: as a site of potential for making money.

We have seen above how both the institutional and the *movement* elements of urban public transport can make it into sites of recognition between migrants. However for Massala-Massala, in danger of arrest and deportation, his first instinct is to combat the anonymity of the transport system and the city:

> A colored woman [une femme de couleur] was the ticket window clerk at Alésia station at the end of that month. I felt at ease, figuring that skin pigment solidarity was a trump card going back to the dawn of time. A man lost in a multiplicity of other humans is on the lookout for someone that looks like him.[71]

Having successfully used up his chequebook and completed his circular journey, Massala-Massala must resell them on the black market. To make a sale, he judges the customer by his 'race', his appearance and his knowledge of the system. And so the plain-clothes officer

[70] Mabanckou, *Bleu, blanc, rouge*, 6. The colloquial expression 'débarqué' might be translated as 'fresh off the boat'.
[71] Alain Mabanckou, *Blue White Red: A Novel* (Indiana University Press, 2013). P. 118

who arrests him is black and approaches Massala-Massala using the prearranged signals. We never know if Préfet has set him up, but certainly Préfet has disappeared with most of the money by the time Massala-Massala is caught.

A similar story of exploitation and petty crime plays out in *Tais-Toi et Meurs*, when Julien, a recent arrival from Congo-Brazzaville, is asked to deliver a package across town by Pedro, his compatriot and mentor. He doesn't realise that this is a test before he is trusted by the criminal gang he lives with to carry out more important jobs. On the advice of Pedro he never buys a ticket on the Métro, but in this instance he runs into a ticket inspection and tries to run away. It is the black police officer, not the white ones, who races hardest to catch him across the station, and then, looking at his false documents, comments on his ethnicity to the other, white, officers:

> This guy's from Martinique, but he behaves like an African! Those Africans fuck everything up around here, and people mix us up with them because we're all black![72]

Like the British Transport worker in the Pizza Hut in *Forest Gate* (above) the police officer wishes to assert the *difference* between him and Julien. In fact here he is mistaken, because Julien's documents are in fact false. To the black police officer, this encounter with a black man is an embarrassing obstacle to the racialised identity he wants to project, and therefore he is much keener than his colleagues to chase Julien down. While the man in Pizza Hut might be simply exhibiting an excess of fatherly feeling, the disciplining gaze here, in asserting difference, wishes to align itself with the institutional power, and to do so must shift his colleague's from skin colour to nationality.

[72] Mabanckou, *Tais-Toi Et Meurs*, 72.

In both these novels by Alain Mabanckou, things and places usually perceived as mundane, such as Métro Line 4 or the experience of a routine ticket inspection, are reconceived as sites of conflict or danger, thereby revealing the border policing which can happen anywhere for the contemporary *sans-papier* or undocumented person. Massala-Massala and Julien risk losing their place in Paris every time they use the system; by thus transforming the everyday Mabanckou shows the difficulties of an undocumented existence and criticises the forces which exclude, ignore or threaten, ever-present and personified in every ticket inspector.

Encounters, Solidarity and the "Other"

Internal and local journeys are used in these narratives to mirror, investigate and question external journeys from other countries to the 'metropolis' and to develop the identity of the characters. Encounters with the other, distorted by the way strangers behave in public spaces, provide glimpses of the strange and difficult position of the migrant in today's big European city. The use of public transport in these novels reflects their shared concerns with public and private space, with borders and boundaries, and with the transformative or political potential of urban public space.

The chapter has emphasised the qualitative difference between conflictual encounters within the confines of a migrant district, as shown in *Fatima ou les Algériennes au Square*, and the more chaotic ways in which power acts upon the narrator of *Harare North* as he crosses and re-crosses London. Widening the scope again to consider the impact of history and memory, it has discussed how *Adua* uses the 'normality' of public transport and public spaces to question the process which 'others' migrants. Moreover, by constantly

rehistoricising the presence of migrants, calling attention to traces of history within public spaces, and focusing on everyday journeys rather than epic migration routes, the novel connects the colonial and the postcolonial, creating intergenerational connections yet refuting the homogenising of migrants or their journeys into a single fixed narrative. *Adua* also offers liberating moments, in transient encounters outside the fixed community which reflect alternative connections of solidarity on public transport. Older novels of migration have described the hardship of the migrant journey: this is rare in these recent works, within which the bus journey to the shops, the tube to work, indicate that migrant journeys do not simply start and end: they continue for a lifetime.

In *Forest Gate* and in the novels of Alain Mabanckou, the physical journeys reflect interior journeys taken by the characters. Recognition and encounters with the other in the street are heavily dramatized moments of tension and danger, reflecting the protagonists' quests for redemption, security or success. The novels offer 'real' and imagined solutions to social problems such as racism, yet comparisons made between the 'host' and the 'home' country tend to be negative. They model small acts of engagement, communication and defiance as a strategy to negotiating hostility within public space. Lastly, all of these novels work to normalise the presence of the 'othered' by insisting on their presence, carrying out the most everyday actions within the most mundane of places.

Chapter 3: Redefining the migrant home: new relationships and alternative domesticities in the migrant novel

What, where and when is 'Home'?

At a conference on 'Migrant Narratives and the City' in Budapest in April 2018,[1] part of this chapter was presented on a panel which juxtaposed three different working definitions of 'home' within literature of migration. Kata Gyuris described 'non-homes' and homes suddenly lost in the context of the violent displacement of Zimbabwean people from informal settlements in *We Need New Names* by NoViolet Bulaywayo (2013). Robert Kusek discussed Hisham Matar's 2015 memoir *The Return* and the impossibility of returning home for a migrant, the changes in a home over years, and the imagined yet non-existent 'homeland'. The embryo of this chapter, by contrast, tried to present home as the material place in which one lives *now*: the four walls, the rent, the cooking area, the division between inside and outside.[2]

What this talk made clear was the multiple interpretations that can be applied to that short word, 'home', and especially in the context of migration. It has become a

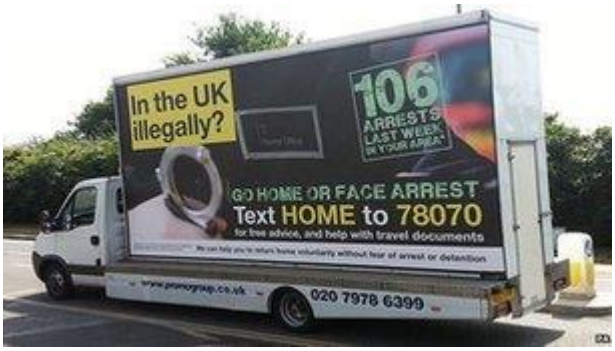

Figure 1: The immigration vans used by the UK Home Office in 2013

[1] Migrant Narratives and the City, International Conference, organised by Central European University and the University of Debrecen, 27-28 April 2018.

[2] Kata Gyuris (ELTE, Budapest), "'Flags of Unsung Countries:' Finding Non-Homes in NoViolet Bulawayo's We Need New Names"; Robert Kusek (Jagiellonian University, Poland), "Curing Oneself of One's Fatherland: Patriography, Nostography, and the City in The Return by Hisham Matar"; Frances Grahl (University of London, UK), "Alternative Living Spaces, Alternative Families: Solidarity and New Kinships in the Migrant Home".

loaded term - frequently used in anti-migrant discourse, including, infamously, on the side of a van funded by the UK Home Office in July 2013 ('In the UK illegally? Go Home or Face Arrest'[3]). In their sociological study of the so-called 'Hostile Environment' pursued by successive governments in the UK from the 1990s until the present day, Hannah Jones *et al* discuss that notorious van as part of a long-running wider discourse about sending 'illegal' migrants 'back home', demonstrating how the van itself was quickly connected 'with the history of the words "go home" as racist abuse used in the streets and by far-right political groups such as the National Front in the 1970s.'[4] In a different context, Otto Santa Ana carried out a study of metaphor in media descriptions of immigrants in Los Angeles in the late 1990s, which revealed regular use of the structuring metaphor he called 'NATION AS HOME'.[5]

For these reasons the definition attached to the word 'home' in this chapter is important, and the chapter attempts to challenge the idea that, for some, home is not where they live but somewhere from which they have come, perhaps many years earlier. Not only is that limited definition inexorably associated with racist discourse within a particular understanding, but it connotes multiple images which it does not necessarily need to include, such as an idealized version of a lost 'real' home, straying from a material understanding of home as *where you live now*.[6]

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[3]https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-24755547, (Accessed 21st February 2018). Photo reproduced from article.

[4]Hannah Jones et al., *Go Home?: The Politics of Immigration Controversies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 11–12.

[5] Otto Santa Ana, "Like an Animal I Was Treated': Anti-Immigrant Metaphor in US Public Discourse," *Discourse & Society* 10, no. 2 (1999): 191–224.

[6] As mentioned in **Appendix 2, Definitions**, this thesis uses the terms 'sending country' and 'receiving country' where relevant to refer to the countries from and to which migration has occurred, bearing in mind that the migration described in the works studied may not be the only international movement in the lives of the characters.

Home, including within political debate, has also been used as a metonym for the nation state, and recurs as such in public discourse about migrants and migration. The *Collectif Sans Papiers* (Collective of Undocumented People) of Paris 75 meets every Friday for a small demonstration in the Place de La République in central Paris. Among their chants can be heard the memorable "On s'en fout/ On est chez nous!".[7] To be "chez nous" (which roughly translates as "at home" or "at my place") thus becomes a radical claim in the face of institutional and social othering.

Sara Ahmed draws on her own migratory and international experiences to question this metonymic method of understanding 'home', showing that it risks presenting both 'home' and 'nation' as closed, limited spaces, when in actual fact both have always been porous and constantly changing. In fact, representations of both home and nation as fixed entities with natural orders are often marked by oppression, both racist and sexist, and a conservatism which claims a natural order to maintain the status quo.

> If we were to expand our definition of home to think of the nation as a home, then we could recognize that there are always encounters with others already recognized as strangers within, rather than just between, nation spaces. To argue otherwise, would be to imagine the nation as a purified space, and to deny the differences within that space: it would be to assume that you would only encounter strangers at the border.[8]

[7] "We don't care/ We are at home!" (witnessed first-hand on several marches including 10th February 2017, 16th February 2018). The Collectif des Sans Papiers was founded in the early 1980s in response to a spate of racist violence and government crackdowns on undocumented people. Made up now mostly of people originating from West Africa who have been in France for some time, it exists in different forms in the different departments which make up the Paris/Île-de-France region, as well as in other major French cities.

[8] Sara Ahmed, "Home and Away: Narratives of Migration and Estrangement," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 2, no. 3 (December 1999): 12, https://doi.org/10.1177/136787799900200303.

She suggests, as this chapter will attempt to adopt, an interpretation of home based more on the current, ever-changing circumstances of living than on an imagined home, however tempting this latter version may be. To eschew the home as fantasy, (the 'Englishman's castle'?), as a secure realm cut off from the external world, may mean turning away from the imagined comforts it offers, yet we cannot ignore that the interior, like the exterior, can be a place of contact, of flux, and of conflicting relations.

> The problem with such a model of home as familiarity is that it projects strangerness beyond the walls of the home. Instead, we can ask: how does being-at-home already encounter strangerness? How does being at home already engender desire?[9]

Moreover, as demonstrated by the Budapest panel mentioned above, a migrant may him/herself hold several different interpretations of 'home' simultaneously, including the home s/he comes from, the home s/he (currently) lives in, and the home to which, one day, s/he hopes to return. This chapter will focus on the second meaning, but it is necessary to hold the others in mind throughout the reading process. As Ahmed observes, 'Home is here, not a particular place that one simply inhabits, but more than one place: there are too many homes to allow place to secure the roots or routes of one's destination.'[10] Is it possible to be 'at home' in more than one place? Does a migrant carry their former 'home' with them, and if so, how do the different homes co-exist, imaginatively or materially?

James Procter's 2003 book *Dwelling Places: Postwar Black British Writing* provides a range of ways of looking at migration to Britain and its representation in literature (in this case, from the Caribbean in particular) through the lens of 'dwelling': countering generic

[9]Ahmed, 12.
[10]Ahmed, 330.

representations of migrants as 'on the move' or transient with an in-depth study of the ways in which migrant homes and the permanence of migrant settlement is explored. In his conclusion he discusses an exhibition of photos of the so-called 'Windrush Generation', offering a critique of those now-familiar images of showing new West Indian arrivals waiting in British train stations and ferry ports, and suggesting that such images leave the migrant locked in a 'liminal space between past and future'.

> The eyes of the crowd are difficult to read: are they looking forward, or back? Their gaze appears stereoscopic. The sheer abundance of baggage performs a hyperbolic function within the image. The black crowds are figured floating among a sea of suitcases, sacks and boxes which are themselves signifiers of a community adrift, one the move, homeless. Lined up or piled anonymously together (who owns what here?) the belongings captured within these photos are unequivocally markers of *unbelonging*.[11]

At the time of writing, the UK political landscape is marked by heated debate on these 'Windrush migrants', many of whom, after decades in the UK, now find their right to remain is threatened by the so-called 'Hostile Environment'. Interestingly, the photos Procter mentions have once again been reproduced across the media spectrum. Stories about the citizenship or residency status of older West Indians who have spent four or five or six decades in the UK are regularly accompanied by photos of bright young people disembarking from boats or waiting at train stations half a century ago. Even as mainstream opinion tends towards supporting these long-term residents of West Indian origin, the images, once again, signify the transience of the migrant.

Drawing on Procter's work, this chapter regards migrant homes, however closed off or 'hidden' they may be, as an essential component of the migrant city, and as a way to

[11]Procter, 204–5.

counter those narratives of transience and 'newness' which, as Ryan Trimm observes, are always intended to establish alterity; to other the migrant.[12] While the distinction between public and private space has been dismantled within feminist theory,[13] there exists a lingering uncertainty about the treatment of migrant homes within fiction. This chapter discusses shifts in the ways in which the home is portrayed within recent novels of migration to Paris, London and Rome, taking as its starting position that an analysis of representations of the home is essential to any discussion of literature and the city. It employs three case studies to discuss the security of the migrant dwelling- place, the effect of material descriptions of domesticity, work inside the home and hospitality and the relationships between neighbours and co-habitants. In so doing, it argues that there has been a shift in the way the 'migrant dwelling' is represented in the three regions, and throughout European literature of migration more widely.

While it will touch upon the structure of the family and the quality of housing as described in these works, it attempts to limit itself to the domestic space, to how it functions, the labour and the relationships that allow that functioning to happen, and to critically examining the bordering process that happens between the interior and the exterior. After a brief overview of certain recent trends in the description of domestic spaces in recent novels, this chapter will investigate three unusual domestic configurations in fiction of migration.

[12]Ryan Trimm, "After the Century of Strangers: Hospitality and Crashing in Zadie Smith's White Teeth," *Contemporary Literature* 56, no. 1 (2015): 145–72.
[13]Nadje Al-Ali, "Review Article Nationalisms, National Identities and Nation States: Gendered Perspectives," *Nations and Nationalism* 6, no. 4 (2000): 631–638. (inter alia)

Clash of Civilisations over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio, the 2006 novel by Amara Lakhous, is a multicultural, multi-charactered novel in the tradition of Zadie Smith, and unpacks the relationships within a Rome apartment block to explore the themes of tolerance and integration.[14] Abdellah Taïa's *A Country to Die In* shows the home not only as a place of work, but as a space within which radical new relationships are possible.[15] And finally, *Minaret* by Leila Aboulela sets up a romance inside a wealthy flat in which a Sudanese woman works as a maid, using the impossibility of the relationship to destabilise the power and work relations within the home.[16] The chapter will investigate domestic and reproductive work, housemates and other co-habitants, and the material circumstances which mark the ways in which the (migrant) home fits into the city. As such, of the three types of 'home' briefly described at the beginning of this section - the home left behind, the current home and the home of the fantasy of return, it will limit itself to the second. It argues, nonetheless, that all three can be contained in one building, and as the following section will emphasise, the threshold of a migrant home might also be a pathway to a remembered or imagined 'home country'.

As mentioned above, multiple problems can arise from the creation of a simplistic dichotomy between public and private spaces, and while this paper looks at labour, gender and relationships inside the domestic space, it seeks to avoid the trap of speaking only about the home as a closed, gendered, limited space. This danger is amplified within perspectives on the *migrant* city due to forces of marginalisation and othering within the public realm, which can lead to the home being a site to defend against external pressures.

[14]Lakhous, *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a Piazza Vittorio*.
[15]Taïa, *Un pays pour mourir*.
[16]Leila Aboulela, *Minaret*, (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2006).

However, in several recent novels of migration, there is also an exploration of what we might call the 'threshold zone', the doorway or entrance which blurs the boundaries between the public and the private. Frances Stonor Saunders goes further, in a recent exploration of how borders are understood, seeing the front door itself as a frontier.

> The one border we all cross, so often and with such well-rehearsed reflexes that we barely notice it, is the threshold of our own home. We open the front door, we close the front door: it's the most basic geographical habit, and yet one lifetime is not enough to recount all our comings and goings across this boundary.[17]

In another interesting example, Helen Oyeyemi's 2008 novel *The Opposite House*,[18] the home becomes a magical realm which can be seen to function as a doorway between the migrant's country of origin and country of destination. The '*somewherehouse*' in her novel has two doorways, one which leads to London, one to Lagos. To follow the thread of possibility implied by this mystical house is to acknowledge the possibility of transportation at the threshold of a migrant home. Crossing through the door might take one to another culture, another nation, even another time. The historic construction of migrant homes in fiction as places which foster traditional values and resemble an imagined 'Back Home' is thereby complicated, and the migrant home or dwelling becomes multi-functional, looking both *forward and back*. Thus the home is freed from the constraints of traditional mono-culture to become a site of struggle and change, with the possibility of the space of a home being emancipatory in and of itself.

The idea of hospitality within the migrant home also arises repeatedly in the three case studies. Wider theories of migration sometimes set up a parallel between private or

[17]Frances Stonor Saunders, "Where on Earth Are You?," *London Review of Books*, March 3, 2016.
[18]Helen Oyeyemi, *The Opposite House* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008).

individual hospitality - the idea of inviting a friend or stranger into your home – and the reception of groups of migrants into a 'receiving country'. This paper uses Tahar Ben Jelloun's analysis of what 'real' hospitality entails to discuss acts of hospitality within the two novels, and offers a critique of this reductive way of understanding larger scale migratory flows. In fact, each of the three case studies show a different form of hospitality, a 'stranger-to-stranger' hospitality in which migrants accept other migrants into their homes, and the paper considers the ways in which this is presented as empowering or constraining, and what alternative models of family and relationships are offered to the reader.

But this chapter also attempts to define 'home' in material terms, looking at the network of human relations that construct a home, the daily tasks and domestic duties that maintain it, and finally the radical potential that the power of hospitality might hold within itself. The chapter comments on the ways in which the 'everyday' of domesticity and labour inside the home is critically re-imagined within the three works. What happens inside the home? What activities and processes, such as the reproductive labour traditionally carried out by women, need to be de-stabilised and critically examined? What hidden aspects of family life must be brought into the light? By focusing on the material and everyday as described in fiction, it seeks to explain how such descriptions can complicate wider narratives of human relationships, by grounding bigger stories in financial contingency, domestic labour and universalising details which show how 'home' is constructed.

Background: The Role of the Home in Novels of Migration

An overview of novels of migration in the three cities in the post-war period reveals a series of clear tendencies in the construction of 'home' over time. In Paris and London, migrants experienced racist 'colour bars' in the immediate post-war period which made access to housing difficult. These shortages in access to housing were answered over several decades by large-scale social housing construction, which carried its own specific problems such as marginalisation as cities sprawled and suburbs grew. The West Indian writers of the 1950s and 1960s such as Sam Selvon and George Lamming describe rooms to let in male-dominated communities which emerged in specific areas of London during this period, descriptions which are echoed in some of the more prominent novels by West and North Africans in Paris such as the works of Bernard Dadié.[19]

As families gradually came to join working men in both France and the UK, the 'home' became less transient and began to be formulated around the family, with novelists in France such as Leila Sebbar and Azouz Begag looking at the social problems of ghettoised housing and how they impacted on migrant families attempting to maintain continuity with their pre-migration ways of life. Later, in the 1980s and 1990s, writers such as Hanif Kureishi and Meera Syal would produce works in which fulfilment for the young protagonists means escape from their stifling, conservative and traditionally-gendered family homes, while in the Francophone field novelists including Ahlam Mosteghanemi and Assia Djebar explored the ways in which gender roles and national traditions could be maintained or subverted

[19]Bernard B. Dadié, *Un nègre à Paris: roman* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1996). *inter alia.*

following migration to Paris.[20] Describing this second wave of migration narratives, one which is associated with the children and grandchildren of those who migrated, Kwame Dawes comments on the way 'home' needs to be defined and redefined within the genre.

> In addition to a large group of writers who inhabit and explore an international and in-between identity, there is a second group fixated on home - a geographical home, and in this, they are no different from the 'exile' writers of the sixties -the Brathwaites, Selvons, Salkeys, et al. The difference, of course, is that home is no longer the Caribbean or Africa - home is Britain. In other words, they are contending with the 'homeness' of Britain. It is an uncomfortable contention and one that does not always lead to the same conclusion, but it begins at the same fundamental place: we are citizens in this country, some of us were born here, have lived here all or most of our lives; this is home. Why does it not feel like home?

Both in France and the UK, it is necessary to reflect on how cities and societies have been shaped by several generations of large-scale migration, and the complexity of a climate in which the literary production of the so-called 'second and third generations', the children and grandchildren of those who migrated, is sometimes read as 'migration fiction' and sometimes differentiated from works by and about those who have themselves migrated.

In Italy, where the field of *migration fiction* (as opposed to memoirs or ghost-written biographies) is much younger, these trends are not so obvious. Indeed, Italian migration of the 1980s and early 1990s tends to focus on the colonial and postcolonial history which connects the migrant subject to the receiving country. Through the 1990s, works tend to situate themselves more clearly into an Italian literary canon, employing more experimental and literary styles to give voice to pluralistic and ambiguous portraits of the migrant

[20] Hanif Kureishi, *The Black Album* (Faber & Faber, 1996); Hanif Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* (Faber & Faber, 2009); Meera Syal, *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (Black Swan, 2015); Meera Syal, *The House of Hidden Mothers* (Black Swan, 2016); Meera Syal, *Anita and Me* (HarperCollins UK, 2012); Ahlam Mosteghanemi, *Memory In The Flesh*, trans. Baria Ahmar Sreih and Peter Clark (London: Arabia Books, 2008); Assia Djebar, *Blanc de L'Algerie* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1996); Assia Djebar, *Vaste Est La Prison* (Paris: Librairie generale francaise, 2002).

experience.[21] This very different literary field does not allow for the broad surveys possible in London or Paris, but certain similarities can be observed. (It is worth noting at this stage as well that the broad trends sketched above follow patterns of major migratory flows, reflecting general tendencies, and are marked both in Anglophone and Francophone literature by radical exceptions, such as for example the works of Xiaolu Guo and Diriye Osman writing about London, and Nelson Nobleman and Linda Lê in French.)[22]

Since the 1990s, a shift in these (political) binaries between interior and exterior, between public and private spaces, can be observed within migration fiction. A sample of novels written over the last twenty-five years in France, the UK and Italy reveals that new configurations of the family unit and new living arrangements are appearing more and more. While financial precarity and material concerns remain key within fictional accounts of the migrant home, more and more examples can be found of the home as a locus of social change, or as a site of possibilities which are absent in the outside world. Feminist and queer perspectives are added to an increasingly heterogenous landscape of novels of migration which situates the migrant subject not in a *banlieue* or ghetto, but *right inside* the chaotic yet potentially liberating hurly-burly of the twentieth century metropolis. These works begin to offer answers to the question of that heavily gendered migrant home, which has historically been represented as an oppressive space, a feminised space, or a space in which the form and hierarchy of (family) relationships rarely changes.

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[21] Among others, Younis Tawfik, *La straniera* (Bompiani, 2001); Gabriella Kuruvilla, Ingy Mubiayi, and Igiaba Scego, *Pecore Nere: Racconti*, ed. F. Capitani and E. Coen (Laterza, 2007); Igiaba Scego, *Oltre Babilonia* (Donzelli, 2008); Ghermandi, *Regina di fiori e di perle*.

[22] Guo, *I Am China*; Xiaolu Guo, *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers*, (Vintage, 2008); Diriye Osman, *Fairytales for Lost Children* (Team Angelica, 2013); Nobleman Nelson, *Toi l'Immigrée* (Theles, 2007); Nobleman Nelson, *African Teenager* (E-Dite, 2010); Linda Lê, *Par ailleurs, exils* (Christian Bourgois, 2014); Linda Lê, *Les Trois Parques* (Christian Bourgois, 2011).

Indeed, in a work such as Bernadine Evaristo's *Mr Loverman*, the traditional heterosexual family home is not replaced but destabilised by the protagonist's homosexual romance, a covert relationship which goes back to the 1950s in Antigua, prior to his migration to London.[23] The novel does not express a radical shift in how families are organised; rather it reveals an imaginative space between what is socially acceptable and what is hidden, exploring the pressures on the protagonist due to hetero-normativity within his West Indian migrant community and across wider society, and subverting the trope of the traditional family home. In the thesis for her PhD in Creative Writing which accompanied the publication of *Mr Loverman*, Evaristo suggests that a preoccupation with the domestic has historically been associated with female writers. As she sees it, new ways of imagining the home fit into recent Black British writing due, in part, to its newly intersectional concerns.

> The thematic underpinning of Second Generation fiction is summed up by Kwame Dawes as negotiations of home. He asks, 'What does it mean that this home does not feel like home?' While this is part of the preoccupation of my generation of writers, it is not the whole story, and the ways in which home is manifested is markedly different between the genders.[24]

New formulations of domestic space, as well as being bound up with gender, thus also offer insight into how home is imagined for the migrant both as the 'old country' and the place in which they now live, and how the domestic space itself can combine elements of both these places in revelatory ways.

[23]Bernardine Evaristo, *Mr Loverman* (Hamish Hamilton, 2013).
[24]Bernadine Evaristo, "Mr Loverman and The Men in Black British Fiction" (Goldsmiths, University of London, 2013), 349.

Living spaces below the radar: a new turn

However, developing in parallel with these optimistic challenges to stereotypes of migration there emerges a new tendency to depict collective living, a trend which correlates with a series of novels about migrants' lives below the poverty line in the face of rapidly evolving hostility to migration, particularly migration from parts of Africa and South Asia. In opposition to the family home common to earlier narratives, or the bedsits and lodging houses that accompanied stories of the single working man during the first waves of mass migration to France and the UK in the 1950s to 1970s, a new character emerges.

Described by a disapproving media and within hostile policy-making as the so-called "economic migrant", a wide range of novels describe the single young man or woman (but more often a man) who precedes his/her family to Europe or comes alone, chasing his/her dreams or hoping to send remittances back home. Often this character has very limited financial means even before s/he undertakes the dangerous and usually expensive journey by land or by boat. Upon arrival in the European city, s/he cannot easily access government support or welfare, and may have to rely on charity, on 'grey'[25] or cash-in-hand work below the radar of national labour regulation, and live from hand to mouth. These novels correlate to changes in migratory patterns but also to new ways of viewing migration: the new ways

[25] In French, the term 'travail au noir' denotes illegal, unregistered work, 'travail au gris' indicating a casual job in which some tax is paid or hours declared, but possibly fraudulently in someone else's name, or, for example when a migrant is limited in hours or only allowed to accept voluntary positions. Harder to spot by the authorities, this kind of work usually means a lower wage for the employee.
In *Americanah*, having overstayed his visa in London, Obinze works on the National Insurance card of a British citizen with Nigerian origins and pays him 40% of his earnings. '"You know some people take half. Yes, he is in a situation but all of us are in a situation."' Adichie, *Americanah*, 250.
Similarly, the protagonist in *Harare North* uses a friend's documents to register for work. It's no coincidence that these narratives follow moves in France and the UK to place responsibility for checking employees' rights to work on the employer: for example, Geneviève in *Le Roman des Immigrés* is exploited sexually by her Human Resources manager in order to keep the secret of her borrowed documents.

in which young migrant workers are seen as transient, temporary and casualised at best, and as inappropriately ambitious or greedy at worst.

In line with this trend, a number of more recent novels describe alternative squats, collective spaces, apartment buildings and multiple-occupancy homes, usually marked by poverty, in which tenancies do not exist and the length of stay is counted out in weeks or even days, in which a police raid or an eviction can cast the occupants suddenly out into the street, scattering and losing their erstwhile roommates. These novels explore connections between the occupants, and the power dynamics which affect those living in insecure housing in close proximity with strangers, and as they do, they often reveal a world where migration, and in particular migrant workers, have become a source of profit for the canny landlord or conman. To show how the normalisation of extreme poverty has been picked up on in recent novels of migration, there follows some examples of the difficult conditions in which migrant characters find themselves in some of the works studied.

In Alain Mabanckou's novels of migration to Paris, the young Congolese men who arrive in Paris find themselves paying Congolese fixers to live in sordid squats, sharing mattress space on the floor with their compatriots.[26] Similarly, in *Harare North* the protagonist quickly finds himself paying rent to a fellow Zimbabwean to share a dirty mattress in a squatted Brixton terrace, while *Madre Piccola* describes how the former Somali Embassy in Rome became, for several years in the 1990s and 2000s, a squat for transient Somali people attempting to cross out of Italy.[27] The theme of poor, dangerous, slum housing arises over and over again.

[26]Mabanckou, *Bleu, blanc, rouge*; Mabanckou, *Tais-Toi Et Meurs*.
[27]Chikwava, *Harare North*; Ali, *Madre piccola*.

Nobleman Nelson's novel *Toi L'Immigré* tells the story of the notorious fire at slum Hôtel Paris Opera in which 24 migrants, including 11 children, died in 2005. 'Those who remained were there because they didn't have a choice. They would still have to wait for a long time before their dream of getting a decent apartment, and of living a normal life, became a reality.'[28] Jojo and Charlie, the heroes of the heavily ironic *Le Paradis du Nord*, rarely even stay more than a few nights under a roof as their dream becomes a nightmare: 'Jojo stooped to enter a second room, a little larger, which smelled of mould. A camping lamp gave out a weak light. Three of the corners of the room were occupied by thrown-together beds. Jojo deduced from this that three people lived there.' [29]

A gulf emerges between the family home - often connected to the second generation, or those who have been financially successful before or after migrating - and the young men, often with nothing, who must strike out on their own in order to make life in the destination country work. Hostile policies towards migrants, particularly those perceived as "economic migrants" such as young single men, have led to greater housing insecurity and greater levels of dispossession in all three countries, and this is certainly reflected in novels from the last couple of decades. In fact, until the 1980s it seems that poverty affected families more

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Farah took this story from the real occupation of the Somali Embassy in Via dei Villini 9. The building was evacuated (despite grave concerns expressed by aid agencies about the 140 people living inside) in 2011 and its windows bricked up to prevent new occupation.
After more than 20 years of closure, a new Somali Embassy opened in a different building in 2017.

Ricci, Fabrizio and Carlo Ruggiero, "Roma - I Fantasmi Dell'Ambasciata Somala - Progetto Melting Pot Europa," accessed September 19, 2019, https://www.meltingpot.org/Roma-I-fantasmi-dell-Ambasciata-Somala.html#.WzKaXqdKiM8.
Thomson Reuters Foundation, "Somali Refugees Shelter in Old Rome Embassy," news.trust.org, accessed June 26, 2018, http://news.trust.org/item/20101228131400-deuf5/.
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Former Embassy Now Home to Desperate Somalis in Rome," UNHCR, accessed June 26, 2018, http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2004/11/419a246f4/former-embassy-home-desperate-somalis-rome.html.
[28]Nelson, *Toi l'Immigrée*, 75. [my translation].
[29]Essomba, *Le paradis du Nord*, 110. [my translation].

than it affected single men: now, with partial rollbacks in the welfare services available to single male migrants in all three states, the opposite may be the case.

Collective Living: Neighbours, Multiculturalism and Homemaking in Amara Lakhous' *Clash of Civilization Over An Elevator in Piazza Vittorio*

The first section of this chapter is devoted to the 'Roman' work of Algerian-born novelist Amara Lakhous, whose novels each describe a diverse community within the city, and will explore how the domestic, the interior and the everyday are constructed and used to describe migration, looking at the ways in which people live together in buildings or small communities.

This section attempts these analyses of human relationships and the way in which they construct (or attempt to construct) 'home' by analysing Lakhous' 2006 novel *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a Piazza Vittorio* (*Clash of Civilizations Over An Elevator in Piazza Vittorio*, henceforth *Clash of Civilisations*),[30][31] in which migrants, internal migrants and Romans live close together in an apartment block, in a Roman square known for its migrant populations. The adventure in the apartment building, narrated in light, comic style around a murder-mystery plot, also explores the ways in which migrants and so-called 'locals' interact and coexist, including different enactments of racism within 'interior' or domestic space. This section will also consider the geography of the building itself, and the ways in

[30]Lakhous, *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a Piazza Vittorio*. This thesis cites the translation by Ann Goldstein (see following footnote).
[31] Amara Lakhous, *Clash of Civilizations Over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio* (New York: Europa Editions, 2008). All citations from *Clash of Civilisations* are taken from this translated edition.

which this might affect relations, with reference to how it is constructed and the way it can be read as a "contact zone", in Pratt's term. From a close reading of Lakhous' text, this section will ask to what extent home creation can take place in such collective spaces, and how a 'migrant home' fits into the spaces around it, considering integration, daily life, material concerns and the geographical elements in the city novel.

Amara Lakhous, the most commercially successful writer in the Italian language studied in this project, was born in Algeria in 1970, and spoke French fluently when he moved to Italy, his father having worked in France for a number of years. He translated his first works himself from Arabic to Italian, using a loose style of translation which he adapted to suit the destination language and culture, and has also written Arabic versions of some of his eight novels published in Italian, which include two books for children. "I wrote *Clash of Civilizations over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio* in Arabic first and then I re-wrote it in Italian, I didn't translate it – in fact I betrayed it."[32] Setting himself clearly apart from francophone writers of West and North African origin, he nonetheless recognises influences from the French-language canon, including authors such as Calixthe Beyala and Assia Djebar. "To write in French … there are many Algerian writers who write in French. Algerian writers who write in Italian are few. Also I continue to write bilingually, in Arabic and Italian."[33]

Lakhous is now identified with Italian migrant writing but even more within Italian popular fiction. He holds Italian nationality and frequently speaks about his adoption of Italian

[32]Claudia Esposito, "Literature Is Language: An Interview with Amara Lakhous," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 48, no. 4 (September 2012): 422, https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2011.559126.
[33]Esposito, 421.

nationality. However, first and foremost, Lakhous identifies his citizenship through words and language.

> "I became a citizen of the Italian language. Language is like a mother. It loves you, because you are its son. To learn a language, there is no need for visas, passports, Schengen, residency permits."[34]

In his paper on Lakhous's linguistic hybridity, Andrea Groppaldi identifies the political power of Lakhous' multidirectional self-translation and linguistic flexibility: 'What emerges is a "linguistic identity", and not only that: new, dynamic, a space in which stereotypes find no reply, a language which is no longer solely Italian nor solely Arabic: a "creole" language.'[35]

Lakhous has gained both popularity and critical attention over the fifteen years he has been active as a writer in Italian, and is often cited as one of the major voices representing Italy's growing migrant and especially North African communities.[36] Strong evidence of inspiration taken from British migration literature, and in particular Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, can be traced in his work. Like Smith, Lakhous uses comic representation of encounters and farcical misunderstanding between different people in order to make more serious points. Based in the city, first Rome and later Turin; his works, like Smith's, feature multi-ethnic casts of characters and tend to foreground encounters between people who experience marginalisation in different ways.[37] *Clash of Civilizations*, in particular, continually insists

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[34] Lakhous cited in Andrea Groppaldi, "La lingua della letteratura migrante: identità italiana e maghrebina nei romanzi di Amara Lakhous.," no. 2 (2012): 1. [my translation].
[35] Groppaldi, 5. [my translation].
[36] "Creolizzare l'italiano - Il Fatto Quotidiano," https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2011/12/07/creolizzare-litaliano/175925/ (Accessed 18th September 2019); "Il romanzo di formazione del futuro," *il manifesto* (blog), May 6, 2019, https://ilmanifesto.it/il-romanzo-di-formazione-del-futuro/; Powers, "Italian Crime Novels Make An International Splash," NPR.org, https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=96904646 (Accessed 18th September 2019).
[37] Lakhous made his name as a writer of Rome; his most recent novels, *Dispute Over a Very Italian Piglet* and *The Prank of the Good Little Virgin of Via Ormea*, are set in Turin.
(Amara Lakhous, *Contesa per un maialino italianissimo a San Salvario* (E/O, 2013); Amara Lakhous, *La zingarata della verginella di via Ormea* (Dal Mondo, 2014).)

that there is no "normal" Roman citizen, no "base identity" from which the rest of the residents can be othered.

Clash of Civilisations Over An Elevator in Piazza Vittorio takes place in and around an apartment building in the popular district of Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II, not far from the centre of Rome and very close to Termini, its main station. Piazza Vittorio is one of the most diverse areas in metropolitan Rome, and is known for its market, in which products and goods from all over the world are sold by people of highly diverse origins. Like many similar areas in other European cities, it was run down for a long time and several large charities support homeless people and those with substance issues in the vicinity: however it is located in a central position in the modern city, a short walk from some of the major touristic and political sites, including important Roman ruins.

As the novel opens, Lorenzo Manfredini, also known as The Gladiator,[38] a young Italian man who has lived in the building for his entire life, has been found dead: stabbed to death and left in the elevator. Through the pages which follow, the residents of the building will testify in chapters alternating with the diary-like 'Howls' of the main suspect, a much-loved neighbour known as Amedeo, who turns out to be harbouring a secret identity which his neighbours find difficult to believe. This unusual sectioning of the novels allows for a series of secrets, misconceptions and hidden opinions to unfold one by one. Rather than a linear plot, the novel is composed of memories and personal accounts, building up a picture of how the building functions, flat by flat, across space rather than over time. As the detective

[38] It is no accident that The Gladiator (*Il Gladiatore*) has a name which recalls Rome's ancient history, but simultaneously the victims of the Roman Empire, brought from many of the same places as the migrants in the story: North Africa, Northern Europe, Persia; to fight for the entertainment of the citizens.

novel builds towards its dénouement, a picture develops of the links binding friends and neighbours inside this enclosed space.

Critic Ugo Fracassa situates Lakhous within the heritage of *gialli*, Italian detective fiction, remarking on how Lakhous has adapted his title from a very well-known work of literary detective fiction, *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* by Carlo Emilio Gadda (A rough translation from the Roman dialect is *That Terrible Mess on Via Merulana*).[39] Via Merulana, which at the time of publication in 1957 was a rather smarter road than it is now, runs nearby, and Gadda's inimitable text blends traces of the classic American hard-boiled detective story with a unique, verbose and surreal farcical plot.

Fracassa also offers a convincing explanation of Lakhous' choice to employ the detective genre, suggesting that Lakhous wanted to deflect the reader's attention away from the details which the protagonist, Amedeo/Ahmed, shares with the author's own life. 'In the same way, Lakhous "invented" the corpse of Lorenzo Manfredini, AKA the Gladiator, because the private story of Ahmed Salmi, with its unmistakeable autobiographical connotations, would otherwise be elevated to the status of public meaning ("We need a body").'[40] It is a classic device of the murder mystery to confine its action to a single building or space in which diverse people find themselves living closely together: Agatha Christie's country house mysteries, for example. As Parati describes the use of space in the novel:

> [*Clash of Civilizations*], written as a mystery novel narrated in the first person, focuses on bodies moving in and interpreting a space. This is a space in the process of transformation because it is being inflected by otherness. The novel becomes a locus, one in which a square in the city of

[39]Gadda, *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*.
[40]Fracassa, *Patria e lettere*, 83. [my translation].

> Rome becomes a location of change authored by migrants who reject the drawn boundaries of the world they inhabit in order to appropriate a new way to walk in and about migrants' spaces in Italian cities.[41]

While many of the characters describe affection for others, and all hold Amedeo/Ahmed in great esteem, the presence of the dead body in the lift reveals a darker side to the tenement building in Piazza Vittorio, which will be worked out through the testimonies delivered to the police inspector Mauro Bettarini, who remains unseen and unheard until his own testimony at the end of the novel. For much of the novel Amedeo/Ahmed is also missing: the police inspector's questioning of the tenants rests on the fact that he lives under an assumed identity, having taken on the Italian first name Amedeo. This assumed identity is enough to make the police suspect him of murder. In fact it will later be revealed that Amedeo/Ahmed has been taken to hospital after a car accident, unable to remember his own identity or reveal either of his names. One by one the characters react to the news that Amedeo is in fact Ahmed, an Algerian who has so thoroughly adapted to his new life in Rome that most of them did not know he was a migrant. Lakhous plays with popular understandings of national identity: Amedeo's expert knowledge of the city, his Italian partner and his choice to socialise widely with a range of people all destabilise the ways in which migrants (and particularly those from North Africa) are othered in Italian society.

The first testimony reveals 'The truth according to Parviz Mansoor Samadi', an Iranian refugee who has been in Rome a while but struggles to keep a job because of his poor Italian and his habit of being drunk at work. A restaurant-owner back in Shiraz, he now works as a dishwasher, lamenting the absence of his wife and children who were left behind

[41]Parati, "Where Do Migrants Live?," 432.

when he suddenly had to flee Iran, and railing against the many Italian habits he dislikes, such as the national love of pizza. In what will become a pattern repeated by the other residents of the building, Parviz trusts his friend Amedeo/Ahmed more than anyone else, assuming that he is Italian, and is unwilling to believe that he might not be.

> But then who is Italian? Only someone who is born in Italy, has an Italian passport and identity card, knows the language, has an Italian name, and lives in Italy? As you see, the question is very complicated. I'm not saying that Amedeo is an enigma. Rather, he's like a poem by Omar Khayyam […][42]

The inclusion of quotations, sayings and metatextual references from around the world tie in with the homiletic nature of the text, which is never directly proselytising, but in which the characters regularly offer proverbs which can be applied to wider themes in the novel, as well as the specific moment. Amedeo/Ahmed has supported Parviz through his issues with drink, his crippling loneliness and his problems at work, setting up new jobs for him when he is fired. Again, albeit perhaps in a slightly laboured fashion, Amedeo/Ahmed's personality and confidence are interpreted as a sign of his Italian-ness. Graziella Parati identifies another marker of Italian-ness in contrast to migrant identity in the contrasting ways in which Amedeo/Ahmed and Parviz relate to the city itself. 'Parviz is definitely not a tourist: monuments and postcard-like attractions are not part of his experience of Rome. He introduces himself by talking about being in the subway at eight in the morning.'[43]

Amedeo/Ahmed, is not only immersed in the wider life of the city - he goes for long walks, reads Italian newspapers in the Italian bar and has a series of friendships with such figures of authority as the local police - but he also relishes the city and has *learnt* it, as shown in his

[42]Lakhous, *Clash of Civilizations Over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio*, 14–15.
[43]Parati, "Where Do Migrants Live?," 434.

light-hearted competitions about Roman street names and physical geography with Riccardo, 'who's so proud of his origins, which go back to the ancient Romans. Riccardo drives a taxi, and has been going up and down the streets of Rome every day for twenty years.'[44] This chosen immersion into the city transforms Italian-ness and Roman-ness into something which can be learnt. Throughout the book, Amedeo/Ahmed's skills lead people to re-examine the ways they understand Roman identity. 'Once, after yet another defeat by Amedeo, Riccardo said to him laughing, "Wow, Amede', you really know Rome! Did the wolf suckle you?"[45] Of course the wolf who suckled Romulus, the maternal spirit of Rome, also connotes transplantation and adoption. To be Roman is then perhaps not a birth right, but a process of successful transplantation, of being fostered by an unknown and perhaps dangerous wolf. This is emphasized in Lakhous' Arabic-language version of the novel, the title of which translates roughly as "How to suckle the wolf without being bitten by her".[46]

These two characters, one from Algeria and one from Iran (identities which are often confused in Italy, or homogenised under the umbrellas of 'Muslim' or (mistakenly) 'Arab') are the first to speak in the novel. It would be hard for the two to be more different and these differences destabilise not only the stereotypes attached to Muslim migrant, but also the markers of Italian identity: a love of red wine, for example, or a hatred of pizza. As Claudia Esposito points out, their humorous individualisms work against nationalist discourses of all kinds, transforming the masses into the eccentric individual. 'When people say Italians are those who speak Italian … this discourse of identity being tied to some sort

[44]Lakhous, *Clash of Civilizations Over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio*, 95.
[45]Lakhous, 95.
[46]Nicola Villa, "Amara Lakhous: 'Come farsi allattare dalla lupa senza farsi mordere,'", April 23, 2006, http://www.omero.it/omero-magazine/interviste/amara-lakhous-come-farsi-allattare-dalla-lupa-senza-farsi-mordere/.

of grid, of linguistic entrapment, of nationalism, is troubling. With irony one can create doubt. Because these certainly aren't certainties.'[47]

Clash of Civilisations gradually builds up a picture of the people in the building and the moments and scenarios which bring them together in harmony or in conflict. Secrets are held back and most of the cast of characters have numerous gaps on their knowledge, or misinformation: for example Benedetta Esposito, the elderly Neapolitan concierge of the building, is convinced Parviz is Albanian, while he, conversely, is sure she is swearing at him when she addresses him regularly with the words 'guaglio' (literally "boy" in Neapolitan).[48] These pieces of misinformation and sources of confusion leave the reader in a privileged position: like the police inspector who hears the testimonies, the reader can make out a 'truth' which eludes the individual characters (even the inspector makes a series of mistakes in his interpretation).

With these gaps in information and misunderstandings geographically sited around the stairwell, around conflicts in the lift, and the local public areas such as squares and parks, the building begins to resemble a novel in itself: it is only clear to those who can read the whole book, who can stand outside the doll's house and look in, whereas those inside are glued to their pages, unable to widen their perspective. Lakhous thus employs the detective fiction genre, with its slow build-up of revelations, as a very specific way of presenting a building and the people that inhabit it, highlighting both the friendships and the alienation within the close community. A major theme of the book, beyond national or regional

[47]Esposito, "Literature Is Language," 426.
[48]Lakhous, *Clash of Civilizations Over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio*, 17.

identity, is the inability of one human to know another. Through the false assumptions made by each of the characters, ethnicity, place of birth and 'race' are called into question as useful ways to understand the 'other'. This process takes place chiefly through Amedeo/Ahmed, who answers questions as to his geographic origins by saying he is 'from the South'. 'Amedeo made an excellent impression from that first encounter, but his answer "I'm from the south," worried me a bit. I'm not a racist, but I can't bear Neapolitans.'[49] However there are other, repeated challenges to stereotypes, and the dissemination of false information is a consistent feature. Processes of racialisation, othering and bias affect not only the international migrants but also Italian southerners, Neapolitan and Milanese internal migrants and Romans themselves.

Parati, Esposito and Fracassa concentrate their analyses on the construction and deconstruction of identity in *Clash of Civilizations*, yet, as Parati acknowledges, the geography of Rome and of the building are crucial to understanding these processes. There are two centres around which the people and events of *Scontro di Civilta* revolve: Amedeo/Ahmed, much-loved neighbour; and the elevator which runs through the centre of the apartment block on Piazza Vittorio, in which the body of the Gladiator has been found. The next section looks at how home is constructed around Amedeo/Ahmed and his relationships, while the final section discusses the physical locations in the novel.

[49]Lakhous, 93.

Collective Living and Relationships

The people and the places in the novel, and the strong feelings accompanying the shocking murder and Amedeo/Ahmed's disappearance whirl in a vortex around these, a vortex which is slowly settled into apparent coherence through the testimonies. But this seeming coherence is repeatedly unsettled by the passion and anguish of Ahmed/Amedeo's diary-like contributions to the narrative: the numbered 'Howls' of his innermost feelings.

At the end of the novel the testimony of Ahmed/Amedeo's compatriot Abdallah Ben Kadour reveals that Amedeo/Ahmed left Algeria after his Algerian fiancée, Bàgia, was tragically killed, dramatically rendering 'home' impossible for him in the place where he was. Unlike Abdallah, who moves within a devout Algerian community in Rome, drawn to his fellow North African Muslims, Amedeo/Ahmed has definitely not rebuilt his former home in his adopted country, and in his rare attempts, failure has been starkly embodied.

> At that point I remembered how once, overwhelmed with homesickness for couscous, I went to an Arabic restaurant, and after a few bites I threw up. Only afterward did it occur to me that couscous is like mother's milk, and has a special odor that has to be inhaled accompanied by hugs and kisses.[50]

To Amedeo/Ahmed, homesickness itself is physical, distasteful, and associated with bodily functions rather than the intellectual and study-based methods he has used to construct his Roman 'being-at-home', in Sara Ahmed's words.[51] Within the building and the neighbourhood, Amedeo/Ahmed's former home is thus also present, translated by Abdallah Ben Kadour:

[50]Lakhous, 118–19.
[51] See above, 163: 'Instead, we can ask: how does being-at-home already encounter strangerness? How does being at home already engender desire?' (Ahmed 1999).

> Amedeo is from my neighborhood. I know him very well, just as I know his whole family. His younger brother was one of my dearest friends, my schoolmate and playmate. Ahmed was a person who was loved and respected in the neighborhood.[52]

Unlike Abdellah, Amedeo wants a clean break from his former 'home' and it is this attitude in him that facilitates his near-complete integration, but also makes him an inauthentic or incomplete subject, one whose trustworthiness appears compromised as soon as he disappears.

However, Amedeo/Ahmed's near-total integration, his *invisibility as a migrant*, tends to lead the narration away from some of the issues experienced due to racialisation or to the migrant's (sometimes dangerous) visibility in public. As someone who never stands out, Amedeo/Ahmed shows only part of the migrant experience in Rome: thus Lakhous is able to develop his character against a constructed yet seemingly neutral background, unaffected by how others might see him. In this Amedeo/Ahmed is alone. Lakhous presents most of the characters (all except Sandro, il Gladiatore, Stefania, and Elisabetta) as migrants in one way or another, and in comparison to the idealised story of integration experienced by the protagonist, the other characters are imperfect, inconstant and constructed by their relationality.

One of the least sympathetic portrayals is that of Antonio Marini, the irascible Milanese university lecturer, who exoticises those around him as southern, uncivilised, and distinctly foreign to his own world view. 'Madonna! Where in the world are we? In Mogadishu or Addis Ababa? In Rome or Bombay? In the developed world or the Third World? […] These

[52]Lakhous, *Clash of Civilizations Over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio*, 114.

things don't happen in the north. I'm from Milan and I'm not used to this chaos.'[53] To Marini, Rome might as well be another country: he adds to the body of negative stereotypes of Southerners in the novels by directly comparing the Italian capital to its former colonies, and to the sending countries of many of the new migrants.

Amedeo/Ahmed's identity is opaque to those around him because he answers all queries as to his origins by simply saying he is 'from the south'. Through Marini's northern-centric attitude, Lakhous plays on stereotypes of the different regions of Italy; that from the perspective of strongly Europe-identified Milan, everyone from the peninsula is a southerner: while Marini expresses racist views, they encompass the entire southern half of his own country, including the capital.

> 'Amedeo is a contradictory person: he goes to libraries for research and study, yet he spends hours at Sandro's. This habit is typical of people from the south: sitting in a café talking and gossiping. […] Unfortunately, going to Sandro's has had a negative influence on his way of life. As we in Milan say, "Worse than a Roman."'[54]

Marini's scorn for the lazy, incomprehensible southerners also reflects the rhetoric of the Italian far-right party Lega Nord, lampooned in the novel in Parviz's confused analysis. Parviz, who as an Iranian asylum seeker is the target of the ire of both Lega Nord and Forza Italia, Berlusconi's party, and conflates them both, referring to them as the hate-ridden amalgam 'Forza Nord', led by Roberto Bossosso. ('Bossosso', an unlikely name in Italian, is probably a portmanteau of the Lega's Umberto Bossi and Forza Vice-President Roberto Formigoni.) In coalition government from the 2018 Italian General Election, Lega Nord has

[53]Lakhous, 74.
[54]Lakhous, 78.

since abandoned its original principles of secession for the north of Italy and rebranded itself simply *Lega*.

As the different characters move through Rome, the city is variously displayed as hostile, as confusing, as a place of exhausting labour and exploitation, and particularly as a site of extreme loneliness and alienation. In contrast, several of the resident have 'safe' places in the building, to which they go to hide away, or to restore themselves. Amedeo/Ahmed emits his 'Howls' in the bathroom, showing that he, too, needs a place of solace: 'The bathroom is the only place that guarantees us pure tranquillity and solitude; it's no coincidence that we call it the Restroom. I find tranquillity in this small bathroom. It's my nest, and this white bowl where I sit to take care of my needs is my throne!'[55] For his friend Parviz, the elevator is associated not only with meditation but also with the ups and downs of his own fortune.

> I adore the elevator. I don't take it because I'm lazy – I meditate in it. You press the button without any effort, you go up or descend, it could even break down while you're inside. It's like life, full of breakdowns. Now you're down, now you're up. I was up … in Paradise … in Shiraz, living happily with my wife and children, and now I'm down … in hell, suffering from homesickness. The elevator is a tool for meditation. As I told you, it's a practice I'm used to: going up and down is a mental exercise like yoga.[56]

Unfortunately for Parviz, the other residents of the building regard his time in the elevator with deep suspicion. In fact it reflects Parviz' moods: as a political refugee struggling to build his life again in Rome without his family or his successful business, he tends to swing into long episodes of despair, from which he is repeatedly lifted by Amedeo/Ahmed's attentions.

[55]Lakhous, 28.
[56]Lakhous, 17.

Amedeo/Ahmed also provides him with the occupation he loves, asking him to cook for parties in order to lift him out of depression.

> Each of us has a place where we feel comfortable. For some it's a church, for some a mosque, a sanctuary, a movie theater, a stadium, a market. I feel comfortable in a kitchen. And it's not that surprising, because I'm a good cook.[57]

The Peruvian Maria Cristina also looks for secret places: as a domestic companion for an elderly Italian woman in poor health, she is both lonely and in search of a space to be alone.

> In the beginning I used to cry alone in the bathroom. But the bathroom is horrible and sad, no one comes to rescue me. I prefer the stairs, because Amedeo doesn't use the elevator. He's the only one who asks me how I am, I tell him my troubles and cry on his shoulder.[58]

Amedeo/Ahmed is identified by Maria Cristina and Parviz with their places of safety: his presence brings comfort and therefore (like the kitchen or the stairs) becomes a calm island in contrast to the constant dangers and pain they experience as they try to fit into the city. Maria Cristina also regularly sees her fellow Peruvians to combat her loneliness, but as for Amedeo/Ahmed, the physical expression of her homesickness and the feeling of collective loneliness makes these encounters less than satisfying, marked again by physical and bodily functions: drinking, singing and casual sexual encounters.

> I do the same thing every time: I go to the station where the Peruvian immigrants gather. Their faces satisfy my thirsting eyes and their words warm my cold ears. It seems to me I've gone home, to Lima. I greet them all with a kiss even if I've never seen them before, then I sit on the sidewalk and eat Peruvian food, rice with chicken and *lomo saltado* and ceviche. I talk for hours, I talk more than I listen, and that's why they call me Maria Cristina the chatterbox.[59]

[57]Lakhous, 19.
[58]Lakhous, 65.
[59]Lakhous, 66.

In *Clash of Civilizations* the former home, the remembered home, is not presented as a solution, but rather as something very physical which surges up in one and then cannot be pushed back down. Only Abdallah, the man who comes from Amedeo/Ahmed's home town, boasts of his pride in his origins and of keeping up his Algerian contacts and habits: 'I will not change my skin, or my religion, or my country, or my name, for any reason. I'm proud of myself, I'm not like those immigrants who change their name to please the Italians.'[60] But Abdallah is also presented as a highly marginalised character, unable to earn much money, absorbed in the news from Algeria, which puts him at odds not just with his integrated compatriot but, implicitly, with Roman society. After meeting Amedeo/Ahmed, Abdallah is surprised that they don't both look back towards Algeria in the same way. 'He wasn't enthusiastic about hearing the latest news from Algeria, so I decided to avoid talking to him on subjects that had to do with our country – I didn't want to upset him.'[61] Amedeo/Ahmed avoids contact with the Algerian community, and implies that their friendship is contingent on Abdallah not bringing up their town of origin very much. Despite his kindness, Amedeo/Ahmed has no interest in seeing migrants suffer from homesickness. 'People say: "Why don't you go to the big mosque in Rome for the prayers for the Big Feast?" No, thank you. I don't want to see hundreds of needy people like me, needy for the odor of their loved ones.'[62]

Instead Amedeo/Ahmed looks to the future, trying to drive progress for his friends, to help them solve problems. Missing for most of the narrative, he is in the words of Jennifer Burns

[60]Lakhous, 113.
[61]Lakhous, 115.
[62]Lakhous, 119.

a 'fulcrum' around which the other characters move.[63] Against the emotional, physical, embodied feeling of homesickness and loneliness, Amedeo/Ahmed employs practicality, intellectual solutions and rationality. He lies to Parviz about the poisoned bird-food the Iranian is unknowingly feeding the pigeons so as not to hurt his feelings. He convinces the Bangladeshi shop-keeper, Iqbal Amir Allah, to send his wife to Italian school, but also takes his anxieties about losing his name seriously when a mistake is made on his residency permit. Several times he negotiates skilfully with the Italian authorities on behalf of the other migrants, or makes peace between warring residents, especially when they have failed to understand each other. He is not just well-integrated: he acts as a bridge between the multiple societies, languages and personalities. As Burns states, 'For Parviz, Amedeo is Rome because he endows the city with humanity.'[64]

Collective Living and Space

Clash of Civilisations does not provide particularly detailed descriptions of the apartment building or the Piazza: the structuring of the novel around personal testimonies minimises the level of novelistic detail included in the text. It would appear also that Lakhous assumes that a Roman or Italy-based reader would know Piazza Vittorio: the nineteenth century architecture by Gaetano Koch is similar to much of post-unification Rome; the reader would understand the structure of the buildings, the way the Italian-style covered walkways on four sides of the square surround a small dusty park, the new shops and cafés which have accompanied the rapidly changing demographic of this area. Piazza Vittorio plays an

[63]Jennifer Burns, *Migrant Imaginaries: Figures in Italian Migration Literature*, (Peter Lang, 2013), 166.
[64]Burns, 43.

important part in one of the most famous Italian neorealist films, *Ladri di biciclette*, when the victim of the bicycle thieves tries to recover his stolen bicycle in the square.

Henri Lefebvre defines different types of space, positing what he calls a *heterotopia* in opposition to the non-place or utopia. Lefebvre's research into the urban environment[65] is noted for its influence on more recent urban theorists, its insistence on a dialectical method of understanding how cities work and its combination of different built, historical and material interpretations under a social umbrella. Space, Lefebvre tells us, is socially produced. Elements of the urban environment reveal the usefulness of Lefebvre's system: spaces are relative to each other, connected and blending into each other and yet distinct, and within cities not only does the identity of a place come from the people who live in it and use it, but also, arguably, its *essence*. Exchanges and negotiations - of people, of capital, of construction and habitation of space - renew and recreate the city, which is never fixed but constantly renegotiated.

> Forms, structures, urban functions (in the city, in the relations of the city to the territory influenced or managed by it, in the relations with society and State) acted upon each other modifying themselves, a movement which though can now reconstruct and master. [...] Local acts and agents left their mark on cities, but also impersonal relations of production and property, and consequently, of classes and class struggles, that is, ideologies (religious and philosophical, that is, ethical, aesthetical, legal, etc).[66]

The heterotopia, the multiple space in which meaningful encounters occur, including but not limited to acts of resistance, is a useful way to understand the city and its component sections and areas. Lefebvre's theory of spatial practice, meanwhile, reveals the contingency

[65] Lefebvre, *Writings On Cities*.
[66] Lefebvre, 107.

and relativity of the urban space and the multiple strands which make urban space a productive subject of study.

> It is reasonable to assume that spatial practice, representations of space and representational spaces contribute in different ways to the production of space according to their qualities and attributes, according to the society or mode of production in question, and according to the historical period.[67]

While Amara Lakhous' *Clash of Civilizations* focuses on one small part of Rome, the apartment block in Piazza Vittorio; it can also been seen to act metonymically as a portrait of the whole city at a certain moment in time, as well as of the new migrant Italy. As Parati observes, 'the novel juxtaposes macro-space and micro-space, for it deals simultaneously with the urban entity of Rome and with one apartment building and its inhabitants.' [68]

The other sites in the novel, beginning with the Roman Metro and encompassing places of meeting such as language schools, public square, official buildings such as the police station, and of course the local café/bar, reflect the different levels of accessibility offered by the city to its new migrant populations. Each is governed by rules (Parviz doesn't understand that pigeons in Piazza Santa Maria Maggiore are to be poisoned, not fed) and each encounter shows unequal powers relations which govern the migrant city. Meanwhile juxtaposed against these public spaces are private sites of empowerment and encounter such as the flat which Stefania and Ahmed/Amedeo share, in which diverse people regularly gather to enjoy themselves, to speak in different languages and share food. Foucault offers a useful connection between the codes affecting place and the construction of social order, key themes within the depiction of migrant lives in the novel.

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[67]Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991), 46.
[68]Parati, "Where Do Migrants Live?," 433.

> The fundamental codes of a culture - those governing its language, its schemas of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices - establish for every man, [sic] from the very first, the empirical orders with which he will be dealing and within which he will be at home.[69]

Meanwhile the elevator, running through the centre of the building connotes different things for its different users. (Ahmed/Amedeo, the perfectly integrated migrant, never uses it, preferring to take the stairs.)

> In *Scontro di Civiltà per un ascensore a piazza Vittorio*, the lift in an apartment block is used as the fulcrum around which to examine the attitudes and prejudices of a multicultural community in Rome. This 'micro-community' is multicultural in the sense not only of harbouring different ethnicities, but more strikingly, inhabitants of different classes, ages, and genders, the identity of all of whom is defined in terms less of personal history than of their experience in the here and now of the small urban area which they inhabit.[70]

The elevator can be read as a 'contact zone' in the sense employed by Mary Louise Pratt:

> [T]he space of imperial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality and intractable conflict. […]The term "contact" foregrounds the interactive, improvisational dimensions of imperial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by accounts of conquest and domination told from the invader's perspective. A "contact" perspective emphasizes how subjects get constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among colonizers and colonized, or travellers and "travelees," not in terms of separateness, but in terms of co-presence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, and often within radically asymmetrical relations of power.[71]

Here are voluntary and enforced meetings between those of different backgrounds and opposing subjectivities: the result is not merely the positive relationships associated with successful multiculturalism, but the messy - and literally bloodstained - violence and

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[69]Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage, 1966), xx.
[70]Burns, *Migrant Imaginaries*, 166.
[71]Mary-Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, (London: Routledge, 2007), 8.

disorder of unequal encounters marked by colonialism. In the centre the elevator ascending and descending through the levels and stages of the building becomes a site of conflict: the *concierge* Benedetta Esposito believes that it should be off-limits to certain residents, while as mentioned above Parviz sees it as a mobile site of meditation and liberation. Again, Parati looks at the spatial implications of that image. 'The elevator embodies the common rhetoric used in political discourse on migrations; it is a rhetoric that tends to continually open and close, allowing and disallowing movement and access.'[72]

Relationships are directly affected by the shape and structure of the apartment block, a space in which the rapid changes affecting Rome are clearly reflected in microcosmic form. The elevator as the centre of a 'spatial field' enables the reader to see the relations throughout the building in the light of a new Italy, one in which migration is simultaneously normal and strange:

> Heterotopias in this way light up an imaginary spatial field, a set of relations that are not separate from dominant structures and ideology, but go against the grain and offer lines of flight or, echoing remarks about Roussel, a 'passage which is an enclosure'[73]

While *Scontro di Civiltà* offers a limited picture of the city, its format and structure recreate the city as home according to the logic of a 'multicultural' text, presenting a heterogenous and complicated network of relations, a real *pasticciaccio*, in the words of the Gaddi novel which lends *Scontro di Civiltà* its name. While the characters might reveal truths (and certainly stereotypes) about migrant lives in the city, as journalist Lodoli suggests, the interesting exploration is of the apartment building, the piazza, and the city. 'But in the end

[72]Parati, "Where Do Migrants Live?," 436.
[73]Peter Johnson, "Unravelling Foucault's 'Different Spaces,'" *History of the Human Sciences* 19, no. 4 (November 2006): 87, https://doi.org/10.1177/0952695106069669.

the real protagonist is the piazza itself, its tangled life of a thousand lives, its mixed-up vitality. [...] It's a new window onto the new city.'[74]

[74]Marco Lodoli, "Piazza Vittorio ascensori e civiltà - la Repubblica.it," *Archivio - la Repubblica.it*, December 6, 2006, http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2006/12/03/piazza-vittorio-ascensori-civilta.html.

Alternative Domesticities: blurring the boundaries in Abdellah Taïa's Un Pay Pour Mourir and Leila Aboulela's Minaret

Exteriors and Interiors: Work in the Home

Abdellah Taïa, Morocco's first openly gay novelist and film-maker, has gained acclaim on both sides of the Mediterranean due to his timely interventions on tolerance of difference inside and outside of the French Muslim community. He is described in Slant Magazine as the 'literary voice of post-colonial melancholy and gay exile'[75] and writes regularly for the French press including *Le Monde* and *Libération*. At only 44 years old, the author of five novels, two collections of short stories and a non-fiction book, he is increasingly well-known for his lyrical, elegantly-shot feature films, which like his fictions explore intersections of gender, class and sexuality within shifting communities in France and North Africa.

Un Pays Pour Mourir, (*A Country to Die In*), is a short novel published in 2015, which follows a Moroccan sex worker coming to the end of her career in Paris, a city to which she is deeply attached, despite her long-held 'foreign' status. Zahira comes from a poor family in the Moroccan city of Rabat, but has spent most of her working life in the French capital.

> I love Paris. It's my town. I don't have French papers but no one can take that right away from me. That belonging. Paris is my city, my kingdom, my path. It's there that I wanted to come. To flee. To grow. To freely learn about the world. […] It's there that I wanted to die.[76]

Zahira is optimistic that she will be able to arrive at a happy marriage and even have children, despite the stigma associated with her profession. She experiences loving, interdependent and generous relationships, including with her best friend, Aziz/Zannouba, a

[75]"Interview: Abdellah Taïa," Slant Magazine, accessed January 25, 2018, http://admin.slantmagazine.com/features/article/interview-abdellah-taia.
[76]Taïa, *Un pays pour mourir*, 53. [all translations mine]

transgender sex worker undergoing gender re-assignment surgery, a process which leaves her traumatised. While Aziz/Zannouba's other friends and clients pull away after the surgery, it is Zahira who looks after Aziz/Zannouba, visiting her daily in her flat to cook and clean and care for her friend, reserving judgement and even helping her to choose her new first name.

One day at the start of the month of Ramadan, Zahira encounters a man who has collapsed in the street, and spontaneously takes him back to her studio flat to care for him as well. Mojtaba is revealed to be a gay asylum seeker from Iran, on his way to London or Stockholm, and as he recovers they decide to spend the holy month together. Zahira cares for and cooks for Mojtaba as they keep the Ramadan fast, and towards the end of the month they spend the night together in the Luxemburg Gardens, in an epiphanic moment of joy and love. These two relationships, with Aziz/Zannouba and with Mojtaba, shape the novel, offering alternative love stories as Zahira continues to hope for a lasting hetero-monogamous relationship. The novel also presents the story of Zahira's father who dies following a long illness in Salé, closeted in the upper storey of his family home to prevent contagion, as well as his sister, Zineb, who is kidnapped during a secretive family expedition and eventually trafficked into sex work in Vietnam during the Indochina War [1945-54].

Zahira has retained strong connections with Morocco, and sends a large proportion of her earnings back there. She also retains the services of three different 'sorciers': magicians who she believes will help her to achieve her dreams. Two are in France; a third lives in the Atlas mountains and she regularly contacts him there. 'He's my favourite one, the one who understands me best, who lets me tell him everything, even the crudest details, the most

sordid things. The only problem with him is that he lives a long way from Paris, in the most distant part of Morocco.'[77] Among the friends that Zahira has been helping in Morocco is one former lover, a man who does not know how she earns her living. In a dramatic scene at the end of the second section of the novel (which describes Zahira's loving relationship with Mojtaba), this former lover finds out that the woman who has been helping him has earned her money through prostitution, and, through magic, flies over borders and seas to murder her in her Paris flat.

> I won't get out of your head, Zahira. I'm always inside you.
> In love once again. Murderous and moving towards you.
> I see the Mediterranean sea. I cross it with one step. I discover Spain. In a blink of an eye I fly over it. I'm in France, going upwards, going upwards. Biarritz. Bordeaux. Poitiers. Tours. Orléans. Paris. The Eiffel Tower. Dark streets. I know your studio. Your prison. I'm crossing the threshold. You're sleeping. I'm no longer only there in your head and in your dreams.
> Open your eyes, Zahira! Open them![78]

The episode ends with these words, and we never discover if the former lover has killed Zahira or not. Nor does the text show in whose mind the fantasy takes place: the focalisation switches to the would-be assassin only for this moment, the magical journey across land and sea. Zahira, innocently sleeping in Paris, is violently hunted down by one of the people that she has tried to help in her country of origin. Perhaps the response is that of the lover; perhaps it represents her own fears or regrets.

The third and final section of the novel connects Zahira's roots in Morocco with the exploitation of women under the former French colonial system, telling the story of her aunt Zineb who disappeared as a teenager (unknown by Zahira). Bound into sexual exploitation in

[77]Taïa, 61.
[78]Taïa, 138.

'Bousbir', an area in Marrakesh known for its brothels, Zineb ends up in Saigon in 1954, where she works as a prostitute for the French army. Zineb is fascinated by the beauty of the great actresses of contemporary Indian cinema, and tries to convince her French lover, a soldier, to run away with her to India; but he won't go. This final section, while it contextualises Zahira's work in Paris in the historical exploitation of women of colour across the world under the French colonial system, also shows how Zineb imagines a home for herself outside of the colonial system, in a third country (a third space) which has, in 1954, recently gained its independence from British rule.

Un Pays Pour Mourir contains several different representations of sex work, from stable and lucrative work, to the violence and slavery of trafficked women, to the danger and precarity of street prostitution. Zahira's own work, carried out in her studio flat, is represented in ambiguous terms: she gains pleasure from selling sex to poorer, disadvantaged migrants, seeing herself in a variety of roles towards them: sister, lover, friend, despite Aziz/Zannouba's cynicism about her lack of success.

> You only offer your sex to dirty immigrants without a penny. Don't be surprised then if you're still living in that 190 square foot box in Barbès. When I first met you, you were living in 100 square feet. Seventeen years later and you've doubled that! Well done, Miss Morocco![79]

Working from home for Zahira is presented as a source of pride and of money, which she sends to family and friends in Morocco, and of a strange conflict between her desire to fall in love and get married and the reactions of her lovers to finding out her profession. However it is also a form of hospitality: she makes it very clear that her clients miss their families, that they are deprived of female company, that she is welcoming them to Paris and

[79]Taïa, 37.

helping them to feel less lonely. Zahira's job is thus presented as both joyous and emancipatory, despite her lack of financial success, and despite the novel's refusal to limit itself to a single response to sex work.

Poverty, Materiality and the Everyday

Najwa, the Sudanese protagonist of Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*, also works in the home, but not her own: she is a maid for a rich Arab family, and as she tells us in the opening sentence, 'I've come down in the world.'[80] Like *Un Pays Pour Mourir*, this migrant narrative is continuously concerned with material matters: with the money needed for Najwa to survive, to thrive.

> 'I do not want a new coat but wish I could dry-clean my old one more often. Wish that not so many doors had closed in my face; the doors of taxis and education, beauty salons, travel agents to take me on Hajj...'[81]

In 1985, Najwa is an 18-year-old student, living with her wealthy family in Khartoum, when a coup and the outbreak of civil war leads her to seek political asylum in London together with her mother and twin brother. Her father is then executed on charges of treason and corruption, his guilt described in ambivalent terms in the novel, hinted at but never confirmed. The family own a flat in London, to which they escape in the expectation that they will be able to return to Sudan. Instead, as the political situation in Sudan changes rapidly and the coup is followed by a military government and then a second coup, Najwa's brother becomes a drug addict and the family sink into poverty. Accustomed to a big house with many servants, Najwa eventually becomes a maid herself after her mother dies and her brother is sent to prison. This transformation, over twenty years, also leads her to discover

[80]Aboulela, *Minaret*, 2006, 1.
[81]Aboulela, 2.

the Islam she has largely ignored growing up, and to find a new source of friendship and spiritual fulfilment at the Regents Park Mosque.

The narrative cuts between the mid-1980s and the early 2000s, as Najwa starts a new job as a maid, working for a wealthy Egyptian/Sudanese family. Now in her early forties, she begins a romantic relationship with the son of the family, Tamer, a much younger man studying in London and also attending Najwa's mosque. When her employers discover their relationship, Najwa is fired and Tamer runs away to live in the mosque. After a series of negotiations with his mother, Doctora Zeinab, Najwa agrees to walk away from the relationship if the Doctora will allow Tamer to transfer from the course he hates to Islamic Studies. In return, the family pay her off with enough money to perform the Hajj pilgrimage.

Similarly to *Un Pays Pour Mourir*, *Minaret* describes several different homes in which Najwa lives and works over thirty years. Importantly, however, the novel offers little description of the small Maida Vale flat in which Najwa has lived alone since her mother's death and brother's arrest, 'the top floor of a house in Maida Vale'.[82] On the other hand, the luxury home in Khartoum in which she grew up is described in detail, from the names of the expensive brands that marked the family's class, to the poverty of the servant quarters: '*Michael Jackson tapes ... Paco Rabanne perfume ... a Toyota Corolla with driver ... Benson & Hedges*.'[83]

[82]Aboulela, 103. [emphasis in original].
[83]Aboulela, *Minaret*, 2006.

However, the most descriptive passages are reserved for the house where Najwa now works, a luxury flat in St Johns Wood whose occupants, used to having servants, leave the kitchen in a permanent mess. Here, too the signs of wealth and luxury are clear: 'She plonks the set of keys on the shelf near the door. The key chain is a flat green picture of Harrods.'[84] Najwa's social fall is presented against this luxury, as a series of analepses show how, after her parents' death, she came to domestic work. Her first job, with 'Aunty Eva', began as a temporary arrangement, but the novel continually refers to the particular inter-reliance that a wealthy woman has with her maid. This connection complicates Najwa's work from a simple wage-earning relationship to someone with a specific role inside another person's family. '[She] needed me' says Najwa 'to chop garlic, squeeze lemons and do the basic things like boiling spaghetti.' The need between the two migrant women, despite their very different material circumstances, goes in both directions. 'What do you mean you're helping her? Help. Waiting upon. Servant's work. He didn't understand that I *needed* her company, *needed* to hear her gossip about Khartoum, *needed* to sit within range of her nostalgia.' [85] The connection and the familiarity between the women, their shared origins and language, even the fact of working with another woman instead of in a male-dominated office combine to make domestic work somewhat attractive for Najwa: 'To be with a family again, to be with one of mother's friends. Something opened up inside me. The need to be useful, the pleasure of being in her kitchen, in finding out where everything was kept, opening her fridge, putting her groceries away.'[86]

[84]Aboulela, *Minaret*, 2006, 89.
[85]Aboulela, 143. [my emphasis].
[86]Aboulela, 141.

Although the work as a maid is difficult and leads to physical pain for Najwa, it is clear that working inside a family home holds a certain appeal for her. Yet *Minaret* certainly does not glamorise domestic work. In addition to describing the physical side, it repeatedly refers to the maid's low status within the family, the difficulty of presenting oneself to one's employer in a submissive way, and of blending in to the background. As Najwa enters the home of her new employers, she moulds her body into what is expected of a maid.

> I keep my eyes and head lowered like I trained myself to do. This is not my first job; I know how deferential a maid should be. I take off my shoes and leave them near the door […] This is my aim, to become the background to her life.[87]

This deferential relationship is one of the most interesting aspects of the novel; it will be destroyed by Najwa's romance with the son of the house, as it humanises her in his eyes, and then more suddenly in the eyes of his mother and sister. In order to do her job well she must show she is not a threat; become invisible inside another woman's domestic space.

Fiercely, determinedly concerned with the material and the everyday, *Minaret* juxtaposes its romantic story line with Najwa's duties in the home, and the long lists of tasks she completes daily.

> He folds his prayer mat neatly on the chair but leaves the bed unmade. Empty cartons of juice and chocolate wrappers lie around the wastepaper basket as if he has thrown them and missed. I pick up his clothes off the bed; they smell of him and make me feel self-conscious.[88]

This concern with 'everyday' jobs such as tidying, ironing and childcare prevent the storyline from focusing on Tamer and Najwa's relationship in any simple way, undermining the

[87]Aboulela, *Minaret*, 2006, 65.
[88]Aboulela, *Minaret*, 2006, 99.

apparent romance by reminding the reader constantly of her status as paid help, and the lack of concern which Tamer evinces for this seemingly huge obstacle.

> Instead of acknowledging his compliment I say, 'At night please put any leftovers in the fridge. Because the kitchen is warm, the food sometimes goes bad and that's a waste.'[89]

The repeated domestic scenes suggest early on that Najwa will not experience a fairy-tale ending, while Tamer and his sister's easy wealth recall scenes when Najwa and her brother first come to London, and live in luxury before the money runs out. 'I hold her pearl necklace in my hand. I once had one too but Omar took it and sold it to buy drugs.'[90] Even as the occupants of the St Johns Wood flat waste food, hold parties and enjoy the lives of wealthy students in London, they recall the time when Najwa and her brother could do the same, a security which proved short-lived, rocked by addictions, and by political developments many miles away.

'Stranger-Stranger Hospitality': Forging new kinds of relationships

Both Najwa and Zahira look back frequently on the complexities of their families in North Africa, and both have reformulated traditional family structures within their own lives, creating different kinds of families with no male head of household. Living alone, they complicate stereotypes of female Muslim migrants in the two countries, while they retain many of the habits and beliefs with which they grew up: their independence is never couched as an assimilation to Northern European social mores.

[89]Aboulela, 101.
[90]Aboulela, 97.

In some ways, both protagonists have experienced childhoods with "traditional" family arrangements, but perhaps this is not a useful category. Both their fathers die young, Zahira's of a lingering illness which she experiences strongly as he is confined to the upper story of their house, becoming a ghost-like figure and the object of her love and pity.

> They took him to the Rabat Public Hospital. He stayed there four months. And then they brought him home. To our place. Our box. Our tin of sardines in a red chili sauce. The ground floor was fairly clean due to our mother, at once shambolic and obsessive. And the first floor was well-built but not yet finished. Rooms without doors, unpainted. A cement-coloured décor for a life to come, a future to be built when money came falling from a forever-blue sky.[91]

The unfinished qualities of the family home echo the fracturing effect of the father's illness on the family. A child, just beginning to experience her sexuality and the effect is has on the men around her, Zahira is conflicted about how to interact with this highly masculine man as he is shut away in a couple of rooms, barely in contact with the rest of the family.

> I didn't think he would die, my father. But I accepted, as almost everyone did, that I wouldn't see him again.
> My fallen father, stripped of virility: I also contributed to his murder.[92]

Meanwhile Najwa's father, a wealthy, larger-than-life character, is executed after the 1985 coup, as she flees to England with her mother and brother. Her brother is arrested soon after for drugs offences and is still in prison twenty years later. The result is a new form of relationship with her mother: 'We were together like sisters.'[93]

While these two family background stories take a prominent position in the two novels, they work more to complicate the idea of a 'typical' family than to provide justification or explanation for the ways in which the two women behave. In fact, the typical family unit

[91]Taïa, *Un pays pour mourir*, 11.
[92]Taïa, 13.
[93]Aboulela, *Minaret*, 2006, 131.

doesn't exist; there is no such thing as a 'normal' upbringing, but in both novels, under apparently normal family conditions, the men of the family *disappear*; Najwa's father and brother into prison, Zahira's father into sickness, seclusion and death. Meanwhile normal life continues, framed by female relationships and the mundanity of daily life. The experimental family formulations lived out by the two protagonists decentre the often over-riding, dominant narratives of masculinity and fatherhood, resulting in much more fluid arrangements in the household.

However, the homes in the two novels reveal the loneliness that can accompany the adoption of an unconventional model of domestic space. The two texts refer to a lack of 'success' in life for both Najwa and Zahira, with the privations that accompany material need. For Zahira, this is countered by her optimism that she will enter a marriage, but Najwa's home is described in minimal detail, while the home where she works is a space of anxiety due to her lack of ownership. In public, as a hijab-wearing Sudanese woman, Najwa is in danger of racist attacks, but her home is simple and lonely, compared several times to the home which her friend Shahinaz shares with husband, children and mother-in-law. Alongside the material and domestic details is a seeming lack of concern about the trappings of 'wealth and success'. Rather than treating a home as a castle, the two novels dismiss, or at least problematize, a simple, gendered view of the woman's home as a symbol of her success. Both women will stage their romantic encounters outside of the home, in public parks, where, as Najwa says, 'it is safe for us'.[94] The public garden is thus presented as

[94]Aboulela, 111.

a romantic, timeless space, distinct from the everyday racism of the city streets but also from the constraints and traditions of the home.

Other spaces and other relationships in the two novels call into question the role of the home in women's lives. Najwa makes her friends at the mosque, where her social status is, at least in her eyes, negated by religious acceptance. When she develops a relationship with her employer's brother, it is important to her that he accept her domestic offerings in the same light, without thinking of her role as a maid. They both attend the same mosque; when they meet there, the power imbalance in their relationship becomes less evident. And throughout the construction of the romance, Leila Aboulela uses domestic materiality to remind the reader of this imbalance.

> We smile at each other. I've finished the ironing but the iron is too hot to put away. I fold the board back into the drawer and slide it shut.
> He says, 'I have to go pray, I haven't prayed yet,' and he leaves the kitchen, blowing his nose. I wash the dishes and think of what he said to me.[95]

As Najwa and Tamer get to know each other, he frequently fails to notice the efforts to which she goes to be on equal terms with him, to give as well as to receive, and to assert her own independence. 'Tamer eats the cheesecake without offering to share it, without asking if I had paid for it with my own money.'[96] In contrast to her submissive position as a domestic worker, Najwa has clear roles at the mosque: here she takes classes with the other women, plays with their children, enjoys social events with her friends.

[95]Aboulela, 118.
[96]Aboulela, 119.

In *Un Pays Pour* Mourir, Zahira also looks after the people around her, friends and acquaintances who are neither family nor lovers, and gains fulfilment from this, including feeding and comforting Aziz/ Zannouba when they experience depression after their gender reassignment surgery.

But neither novel ever abandons the desire expressed by these single women to be in a more traditional relationship. Instead, both express their wish to be in heterosexual relationships, though the extreme language they use to imagine these relationships undermine any possibility that we take them at face value as in the spirit of 'romance'.

> I would like to be his family's concubine, like something out of the *Arabian Nights*, with life-long security and a sense of belonging. But I must settle for freedom in this modern time.[97]

Through this extraordinary and distinctly un-romantic confession to her friend Shahinaz, Najwa highlights the contradictions inherent in the free expression of her desire, revealing in the same breath the compromise of space and freedom that marriage would entail. 'When [Shahinaz] has no room to herself, no time to herself, she envies the empty spaces around me.'[98]

In *Un Pays Pour Mourir*, meanwhile, Zahira finds fulfilment from the comfort she can offer her disadvantaged immigrant clients, men who she selects for their migrant backgrounds and low status, eschewing the wealthier older French men that Aziz/Zannouba seeks out.

> I feel like I'm a sister for these arab and muslim [sic] men.
> It's become my speciality. The arab and muslim men of Paris. Mostly without papers. Mostly worn out by this town that mistreats them without

[97]Aboulela, 215.
[98]Aboulela, 215.

> scruples, and worn out by white French bosses who exploit them in illegal work without the slightest feeling of guilt**.**[99]

She contrasts this with the daily exploitation they undergo, drawing out the intersection between race, class and gender within a system that absorbs working men but denies them a simple way to lead family lives, seeing her sexual services as a tool against the alienation of migrant labour.

Hospitality is another important reconfiguration of relationships within the home in the two novels, as we can see from the mostly wordless relationship between Zahira and her Iranian guest, Mojtaba. What are the reasons that Zahira invites Mojtaba, with whom she does not even have a shared language, into her home for the holy month of Ramadan?

> From his question I understood that he did it, that he fasted. So I lied:
> "Yes, I do."
> With no hesitation, he suggested what would happen, this journey through time: "Shall we fast together?"
> No good thinking about it.
> "Alright, Mojtaba. We'll fast together … Alright."
> From a distance, I could see him smiling. I went back to my cooking, and I smiled as well. I was delighted. Mojtaba was going to stay with me for a whole month.[100]

Of course, Ramadan itself is associated with charity and hospitality, but Zahira's choice clearly affects her work and her precarious finances, a fact which she carefully hides from Mojtaba. She may also be intending to hide her profession from her more devout guest.

> I turned all my customers down during the first three days of Ramadan. I never answered the phone in front of him. I went out on the landing and told everyone the same lie: "Sorry, I'm very sick. Call me back in a few days." And I went back into the apartment, where Mojtaba seemed to have found his place.[101]

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[99]Taïa, *Un pays pour mourir*, 61. [my emphasis].
[100]Taïa, 104.
[101]Taïa, 104.

This act of hospitality, which forms a long middle section of the short novel, reflects a spirit of Islam as Zahira understands it: although as a sex worker and a non-observer she will never be accepted by all Muslims, she extends her act of welcome to migrants in general by accepting Mojtaba as her guest.

Following Derrida, Tahar Ben Jelloun discussed the idea of true hospitality as opposed to a partial hospitality, arguing that Derrida was influenced by North African customs, under which he suggests a host might borrow or even harm themselves financially to show welcome to a guest. 'Hospitality is the act of taking somebody into one's home without any hope of recompense.'[102] Like Derrida, he breaks down those terms 'host' and 'guest' (the same word in French, *hôte*), arguing that true hospitality must be in some way two-directional, rather than a philanthropic act which inevitably asserts power. In *Un Pays Pour Mourir*, in addition to her generosity to her migrant customers, Zahira is showing a hospitality to Mojtaba that functions entirely outside of the perception of migration as the process by which a rich country offers hospitality to poor 'strangers'**.** In both *Un Pays Pour Mourir* and *Minaret*, this act of hospitality from a stranger to a stranger, a 'foreigner' to a 'foreigner', works to negate the impression that accepting migrants is a form of generosity on the part of the host country. The generosity, if such it is, is performed by those who have migrated themselves.

[102]Tahar Ben Jelloun, *French Hospitality: Racism and North African Immigrants*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

Ryan Trimm discusses how *White Teeth* also uses migrant-migrant friendship, solidarity and hospitality to counter a nationalist narrative of migration, presenting it as a larger scale form of hospitality.

> Central to the maintenance of such dichotomies has been the double-edged trope of hospitality, a thematic at once providing welcome and simultaneously drawing sharp and seemingly permanent distinctions between host and guest. Hospitality as trope foregrounds the problem of home and dwelling, thus figuring prominently in postimperial [sic] metropolitan texts.[103]

In *Minaret*, Najwa's relationship with her employers is subservient and unequal, until the climax of the novel, when they are worried she will elope with Tamer. At this point, in the first description the novel offers of the interior of her own flat, it is she who allows Doctora Zeinab to visit her, and greets her with old-fashioned hospitality and tea, which in this case is used to demonstrate her new-found power.

> So she sits before me, in an armchair in my flat […] Since Doctora Zeinab phoned, I have been cleaning, tidying, baking a cake and washing my hair.[104]

The formality of the way she receives Tamer's mother in this new setting, one where she is the owner, negates the previous power relationship. Interestingly, the exchange that follows is business-like, and simple. The Doctora responds to Najwa's new-found power with a straightforward financial proposal. Najwa has taken the power, and in her own home: these two things have a mutual relationship as the Doctora would not normally have descended to visit Najwa's home if she had not had her hand forced, but at the same time, the hospitality and pride Najwa offers work to fortify her position of strength.

[103]Trimm, "After the Century of Strangers."
[104]Aboulela, *Minaret*, 2006, 258.

Re-imagining Domestic Space

I have shown a number of ways in which domestic space is creatively re-imagined within the three case studies. No more just demanding space to exist, these works are now imagining – and thus demanding – a space to be different. Migrant homes are no more doorways back to the 'old country'; rather they are, as so vividly pictured in Oyeyemi's *The Opposite House*, multi-directional thresholds which could lead anywhere in time or space.

In all three cases studies, criticism has tended to focus on identity and the large-scale markers of group identity: on how *Minaret* represents Muslim women, for example, or on how *Clash of Civilizations* brings different individuals into contact to challenge constructions of Italian identity. Yet shifting the focus onto the other elements that make up that elusive yet solidly material space called home might widen the discussion from an identity-based analysis, by setting the construction of 'home' as an identity in itself against its material components. This has two objects: to reveal the many-layered physical phenomena that contribute to a sense of 'home', and to emphasise the complex and everyday actions, interactions and tasks which constantly create and recreate home, themselves ever inflected and complicated by memory and habit.

This chapter has looked at a variety of ways of constructing 'home' from the people who live in it, to the ways in which it is imagined, to the material, financial and physical limitations and everyday necessities, and it seems to me that this lens might allow a productive intervention into discussions about what is universal in a home and what is particular, as well as the ways in which 'home' fits into the geographic realities around it.

The introductory overview of 'home' in migration fiction above showed how the genre often describes home as insecure, squalid and a place of transience, in which temporary solutions to cohabitation tend to take precedence over more permanent, typical family structures. The three novels I have discussed in more detail each show attempts by migrant subjects to transform or at least subvert these aspects. Or, to put it another way, the three migrant protagonists, Ahmed/Amedeo, Zahira and Najwa, are each attempting alternatives, in the form of new kinships, new domestic structures and new ways to conduct personal relationships inside and outside of the home. However, none of these three experiments result in a wholly satisfactory conclusion, and the romantic relationships in Taïa and Aboulela's novels trail to a sorry end, or, perhaps, are replaced by other relationships. Instead, all three works deal in ambivalence, offering suggestions of hope in new kinds of relationships, and breaking down any acceptance of women's domestic roles as natural or necessary.

The restrictions to these imaginative experiments come from poverty and social class as well as racialised attitudes and direct racism. The three novels use an understated materialism to describe the far-reaching consequences on the characters of poverty and precarity. Optimism is clouded by exploitation, particularly within some of the relationships between different migrants. But, importantly, they offer imagined visions of alternative homes and domestic spaces in which rules can be broken, in which the system can be changed, and at the heart of those narratives are characters who don't accept the system. Thus the novels challenge norms imaginatively, without presenting their imaginative journeys as realistic or as solutions to the many problems – of gender norms, of poverty, of borders – which the protagonists experience.

This chapter began with a discussion of the problems of presenting migration as transient and homeless, and emphasising the need to look at the home to counter that. Yet it might be useful to end by quoting Abdellah Taïa's own reclamation of his feeling of transience, in an interview about the influences behind his writing.

> In order to find the place where you can be yourself, you just have to keep wandering: l'érrance […] I felt so alone, I just wanted to cry, but I felt I could not cry next to [my family], so I had to find a place where I could do it. It didn't exist, either.[105]

Home, for Taïa, does not exist: the process of writing itself becomes a journey, a process of self-directed *érrance*, which replaces the different forms of wandering that were externally imposed upon him. And so while the homes in this chapter are descriptions of networks of relationships, of material, physical zones in which everyday tasks and domestic duties are both performed and challenged, and of ambiguously defined liminal spaces with no fixed borders between them and the 'exterior' world, it is also crucial to state that the act of writing home can pose challenges to any of these as fixed places or ways of understanding. By writing home, not only do the three authors call gendered and racialised stereotypes into question; they also create textual 'homeplaces' in which what Iain Chambers describes as 'migrancy' becomes part of the process of constructing and maintaining a home.[106]

[105]Alberto Fernández Carbajal, "The Wanderings of a Gay Moroccan: An Interview with Abdellah Taïa," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 53, no. 4 (July 4, 2017): 501–2, https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2017.1327966.
[106]hooks, bell, ed., "Homeplace : A Site of Resistance" in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (London: Turnaround, 1991); Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*.

Chapter 4: Writing onto the City

Introduction

> The *medina* of Paris, I know it by heart...[1]
>
> Today in this place there is nothing. I go forward, blind, into this abyss. [...] Each time I pass by it, I think that this place should be filled with meaning.[2]
>
> *When cities crack, do stories too,*
> *their scaffolding*
> *collapsing?*[3]

How do migrant novels engage with the history to be found on the streets of the European city? This chapter investigates how three recent novels of migration use texts which 'emerge' from the novels themselves to engage politically with migrant rights and postcolonial history in Paris, London and Rome. It sets the three case studies into the wider context of political engagement with colonial and other marginalised histories, and uses the three texts to investigate the technical literary aspects of novelistic structures which permit such encounters to happen.

La mia casa è dove sono, by Igiaba Scego (*My Home is Where I Am*, 2014) employs maps of Rome and Mogadishu to plot forgotten or ignored histories onto the modern city. *La Seine était rouge* by Leïla Sebbar (1996, translated as *The Seine Was Red*, Indiana University Press, 1999) explores and subverts monuments and memorials to question and rewrite the history of Algerians in Paris. Finally, *The Silent Minaret* by Ishtiyaq Shukri (2005) provides a series of metatextual 'realia', both cited and fictional, to plot the colonial history of South Africa onto

[1] Sebbar, *La Seine Etait Rouge*, 75.
[2] Scego, *La mia casa è dove sono*, 75. [All translations in this chapter are my own.]
[3] Ishtiyaq Shukri, *The Silent Minaret*, (Jacana Media, 2006).

contemporary London and justify its relevance in a post-9/11 world. Drawing on Linda Hutcheon's "Historiographic Metafiction", I practically analyse the impact of metatexts, including not only written sources but also maps, pictures and addresses.[4]

All three novels employ conceptual or metaphorical (re)mapping,[5] in a process which, I argue, extends their engagement with the city beyond the pages of the novel, by entering into dialogue with maps of the city, with activism around migration and its physical manifestations, and even, as I will show below, by materially affecting the geography of the city itself. These physical manifestations might include embodied moments such as demonstrations or journeys, or physical marks such as graffiti. I will argue that a complex, disruptive intertextuality functions to both politicise and undermine these narratives and the meta-narratives which surround them. Consequently each of the three texts has a different relationship with the historical, geographical and social 'truths' surrounding its own story. In taking this approach I touch upon the ways in which apparent truths are built into the physical city: narratives of nationalism and historical and political unity can be found in the very geography of Paris, London and Rome. I look at Pierre Nora's theory of how memory and history can be implanted onto a place, as well as the criticism of his seminal work, to discuss how migrant novels react to these *lieux de mémoire*.[6] In conclusion I evaluate the success of the (re)mapping projects in challenging hegemonic geographical narratives, and in writing feasible counter-histories *onto the city* through fiction.

[4] Linda Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction," *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, 1995, 830–50.
[5] See Huggan, 2008, Ch. 8, 21
[6] Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Conflicts and Divisions v. 1: The Construction of the French Past*, Subsequent edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

Mapping for Meaning: La mia casa è dove sono

Igiaba Scego: 'Nuova Italiana' or 'Romana Somala?'7

> What am I? Who am I?
> I'm black and Italian.
> But I'm also Somali and black.
> So am I Afro-Italian? Italo-African? Second generation? Uncertain generation? *Meel kale*? An annoyance? A saracen *negra*? A dirty *negra*?[8]

Igiaba Scego, a young novelist, essayist, review editor and activist, has produced a number of works which reflect on Rome as a migrant city, burdened by its colonial past and changing rapidly since the advent of mass immigration. In each of her novels; *Rhoda,*[9] *Oltre Babilonia*[10] and *Adua*,[11] a female protagonist of Somali or East African origin must negotiate her relationship with the 'eternal city', and how it functions (or doesn't function) in relation to other aspects of her identity: wealth and social class, religion, migration status and international history. Scego herself, born in Rome in 1974 to Somali parents in political exile from the Siad Barre régime, has become something of a spokesperson for those now referred to as *Nuove Italiani*,[12] co-editing El-Ghibli,[13] an online review of migration literature, and contributing to many other blogs such as the 'Rete G2' project.[14]

In *Roma Negata*,[15] a 2014 essay collection which seems to emerge directly from the highly autobiographical novel *La mia casa è dove sono*, Scego takes a series of walks - 'Percorsi

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[7] 'New Italian' or Somali Roman?
[8] Scego, *La mia casa è dove sono*, 33. (*My Home Is Where I Am)* henceforth *Mia Casa.*
[9] Igiaba Scego, *Rhoda* (Sinnos, 2004).
[10] Scego, *Oltre Babilonia*.
[11] Scego, *Adua*.
[12] 'New Italians', justly problematised as a label by Scego in the above citation (2), probably echoes a similar neologism in Germany – 'Neue Deutsche', and is somewhat widely used in the liberal and left-leaning media in order to avoid othering or more overtly racialised appellations such as 'migrants' or 'Black (people)'.
[13] "El Ghibli," accessed January 1, 2017, http://el-ghibli.provincia.bologna.it.
[14] "Rete G2," *Rete G2 - Seconde generazioni* (blog), accessed January 1, 2017, http://www.secondegenerazioni.it.
[15] Igiaba Scego and Rino Bianchi, *Roma negata. Percorsi postcoloniali nella città* (Ediesse, 2014).

Postcoloniali'[16] - around the Italian capital, through which she attempts to trace faint marks on the city of the history of Italian colonialism and uncover the city's unbreakable links with East Africa, Libya and other countries with a (perhaps less direct) colonial relationship with Rome. The essays and their accompanying photographs by Rino Bianchi examine the forgotten or obscured stories of Romans of colour, and the unseen, un-shown roles they have played in Italian historical events. Finally, she ruminates on her own experiences as a writer of migrant origin, and the way she has personally understood and interacted with the city.

An incentive to read the two works together can be found in Rino Bianchi's striking black-and-white photos of Italians of a migrant background posing in front of the monuments and squares described. Not only does the non-fiction work repeat some of the same stories and revisit the same key places, this time including physical descriptions of the author's own journeys, but it offers a visual representation of some of the key ideas postulated by the novel (see below, Section 2.). The images and maps which punctuate the chapters of *Mia casa* are textual only: Bianchi's images render the places and the people more accessible, more instantly imaginable, to the reader from Rome or further afield. However, as this section will show, the imagined or textual maps within *Mia casa* work in subtler, meaningful ways to supplement and complicate the linear narrative, and to explore the delicate boundaries between the city as a collectively understood and negotiated space, and as an imagined locus brought into being by its individual inhabitants.

[16] [Postcolonial Pathways].

Roma Negata: a Portrait of (Another) Rome

Amin Nour, a 30-year-old Somali-Italian actor, stands tall and confident on a plinth-like block of stone in the centre of Piazza dei Cinquecento, the busy main square which fronts Rome's most important station, Termini. Termini is named after its ancient Roman thermal baths, the remains of which are still standing on the north side of the square. However, the Piazza dei Cinquecento is named for the five hundred Italian soldiers who died in the battle of Dogali, in (what is now) Eritrea, in 1887. Over the last century, the square has played host to a large number of statues, some controversial: an ancient Egyptian obelisk, an Ethiopian lion, and a small memorial to the five hundred which stands today, albeit relocated due to traffic measures.

The station, the square and the surrounding area are the very centre of contemporary multicultural Rome: known for their diverse markets and shops, these streets are markedly different from the more ethnically homogenous centre of Rome around them. Termini Station also denotes a symbolic connection with migration, as the main access to the airport, as well as a stopping point for all trains coming from the south.

> At Termini you find fantastic stuff: from saris to *rummay* twigs to clean your teeth with, you find *goiabada* that the Brazilians eat with cheese and refer to, romantically, as "Romeo&Juliet". Then *eenjera* and *zighini* without end. [17]

[17] Scego, *La mia casa è dove sono*, 106.
[Goiabada: a type of guava jam; eenjera and zighinì: a pancake-like dish with spicy meat from Ethiopia and Eritrea.]

Figure 2: Amin Nour, Piazza dei Cinquecento, by Rino Bianchi, 2014[18]

Nour's erect posture in the photo and his calm, distant gaze resemble a statue: the photo is taken from below so that he seems to tower over the square and the station. From this angle, none of the ancient monuments of Piazza dei Cinquecento are visible, only the prosaic bus station and modern station façade with its horizontal lines cut in half by Nour's vertical body. His body becomes a monument to the new Rome, in the very centre[19] of a city famous for its monuments and statues of Romans of note, great emperors, popes, and generals.

By standing in place of a statue, Nour occupies a position usually reserved either for the 'great men' of Italy, or allegorical figures connected to the history of Rome and the city's identity. This image – in which a living figure becomes a statue – draws attention to what is (and conversely, what isn't) represented in Italian public art, monuments and statuary. While Italy as a nation is comfortable with appropriating African objects as symbols of its

[18] Reproduced from Scego, I and Bianchi, R, *Roma Negata*, 2014.
[19] Or one of the centres.

conquest, it is less comfortable with taking in actual Africans, especially those who are keen to express their own agency. Nour's physically elevated position implies a desire to be seen, a desire for visibility and a certain confidence. Nour's image is an assertion of a diverse Rome, a Rome where whiteness is no longer the criterion for belonging, a Rome in which migrants and people of colour are no longer content to remain in the background, but are purposefully placing themselves onto the plinths that construct the city's history. As Scego writes in the closing chapter of *Mia casa*: 'It's a Rome that no one expected. A Rome in which globalisation has become flesh.'[20]

My Home Is Where I Am: Mapping and Remapping the City

La mia casa è dove sono, a more personal work, intersperses observations about diverse Rome and its colonial history with Scego's own family history. It is essentially a memoir with some novelistic aspects, highly conscious of the complexity and heritage of its own genre: the opening words of the book, 'Sheeko sheeko sheeko xariir',[21] are usually used to begin an oral story in Somalia and as Scego explains, story-telling is the tool she uses to address the problem at the centre of all her writings, 'what being Italian means to me'.[22] In the closing pages she mentions a Karen Blixen short story, "The Cardinal's First Tale", to illustrate the power of stories to accurately describe complex identities.

> I remembered a lady asking the Cardinal "But who are you?" and to that question "Who are you?" the Cardinal retorted: "I will answer according to a classic rule: I will tell you a story".[23]

The narrative is held together by maps and mapping, and it is the interplay between the map that the protagonist slowly creates in her home, chapter by chapter, and the

[20] Scego, *La mia casa è dove sono*, 158.
[21] Scego, *Mia Casa è dove sono*, 11: ['Story story, story of silk'].
[22] Scego, *La mia casa è dove sono*, 160.
[23] Blixen, Karen, "The Cardinal's First Tale" from *Last Tales*, 1957, cited in *Mia Casa*

accompanying stories she tells of the city that structure the novel originally and convincingly.

This section will critically examine this 'map-making' process and the counter-hegemonic potential of maps within a fictional work with reference to Graham Huggan's 2008 book chapter "Decolonizing the Map: Postcolonialism, Poststructuralism and the Cartographic Connection", in which he discusses some of the analytical questions posed by postcolonial map-making.[24] He offers several appealing alternatives to the fallacy of the map as a mimetic representation of space, reminding us that all maps are of necessity ideological, and that the importance of the map in protecting colonial hegemony rested upon it being perceived as neutral, while in fact reinforcing several power structures. The mimetic fallacy implies that it is possible to make a perfect reproduction of the actual terrain. [25] Meanwhile, the structures and networks on a map always promote the importance of one place at the expense of others, setting up or reaffirming a centre-margins dichotomy. Finally, Huggan reminds us that to map a terrain is to *create* a place: colonial-era maps of Africa imply a preceding blankness, suggesting that Western colonial powers were able to put *something* where there had previously been *nothing*.

Huggan provides two major (yet apparently contradictory) models for postcolonial maps. The first functions within a Derridean deconstructivist framework; by changing the emphasis

[24] Graham Huggan, "Chapter 1: Decolonizing the Map: Postcolonialism, Poststructuralism and the Cartographic Connection" in *Interdisciplinary Measures: Literature and the Future of Postcolonial Studies* (Liverpool University Press, 2008), 22–33

[25] Which can only remind us of the Borgesian map: the map with a 1:1 scale, a perfect representation which becomes useless and provides no joy. "On Exactitude in Science", Jorge Luis Borges, *Collected Fictions* (Penguin Books, 1999).

in a map, by calling attention to the seemingly *natural* structures within it which are not natural but there to (re)inforce hegemony, it is possible to *disrupt* the colonial map. The seemingly permanent is revealed to be both temporal and alterable. Derridean 'play' works upon the map, allowing a kind of potential flexibility within the existing lines, which can thus be questioned, de- or re-emphasised. This not only permits the hegemonic order to be questioned, but also prepares the ground for it to be turned upside-down.

Secondly, Huggan looks at the idea of the map as 'shifting ground', the paradoxical notion developed by Deleuze and Guattari that a map is essentially 'open' and thus can be radically transformed. Like a rhizome, it is made up of interconnections which are by their very nature unfixed, and therefore transformable. As Huggan contends

> If the map is conceived of in Deleuze and Guattari's terms as a rhizomatic ('open') rather than as a falsely homogenous ('closed') construct, the emphasis then shifts from de- to reconstruction, from map*breaking* to map*making*.[26]

Huggan correctly observes that Deleuze and Guattari's theorisation of the map in terms of the possibilities and potentials of its multiple connections and disconnections is problematic. However, as a mode of investigating maps within fictional works such as *Mia casa*, it may offer a creative potential while remaining grounded in the structures which govern the map and the 'real world'.

Huggan's brief chapter poses more questions than it answers. Yet in conclusion, he suggests that maps within postcolonial fiction are more than just the 'reworking' of their colonial predecessors, but mark

[26] Huggan, "Chapter 1: Decolonizing the Map: Postcolonialism..." 29.

> the implementation of a series of creative revisions which register the transition from a colonial framework … to a postcolonial one within which [the writer] acquires the freedom to engage in a series of 'territorial disputes' that implicitly or explicitly acknowledge the relativity of modes of spatial (and by extension, cultural) perception.[27]

From this creative taking-off point, Huggan offers the possibility of a postcolonial transformation wider than that suggested by Derrida and more grounded in the extant maps we have learned than Deleuze and Guattari's maps. It is in the light of this optimistic projection of the transformative potential of postcolonial literary maps that I analyse Scego's *Mia casa è dove sono*, looking at the ways in which the author plots her maps onto a palimpsest of older ones, how she questions the blank spaces in the Italian colonial narrative, and how she uses her maps to re-historicise the black and African presence in Rome.

'Ti potrei fare un bel disegno': 'I could draw you a beautiful picture'28

La mia casa è dove sono begins at a family party in Manchester. As Igiaba, the narrator and protagonist,[29] explains, her family has been affected differently by their complex heritage, and her brother Abdul has now settled with his wife and child in the North of England, where he works as a taxi driver. The reunion includes her cousin O, who holds Finnish citizenship but moved to the UK after experiencing violent racism by Helsinki skinheads. Igiaba herself is 'just visiting' from Rome; she is 'l'italiana della barzelletta'.[30] Also present is her English-Somali sister-in-law and Igiaba's mother, who also holds Italian citizenship.

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[27] Huggan, 30.
[28] Scego, 23.
[29] For purposes of clarity and to emphasise the fictionalised and novelistic nature of *Mia casa è dove sono*, this paper will refer to Scego, the author of the text, and Igiaba, the protagonist and narrator.
[30] Scego, 16, 'The Italian of the joke': 'We were a bit like one of those old jokes. There's an Englishman, an Italian and a Finn, and…' 19.

After eating, the family begin to discuss the geography of Mogadishu. We will discover later that each of them has left the Somalian capital at a different time: Scego's mother in the early 1970s, Cousin O after the outbreak of civil war in 1991; Igiaba herself, born in Rome, has only ever been for a few years as a child and later, as a student, just before the start of the civil war. An argument breaks out about the geography of the city.

> "What was the name of the cemetery where Grandmother Auralla is buried?"
> The two men and the child looked at me, confused. [...]
> Cousin O was the first to attempt an answer. "At the Sheikh Sufi Cemetery, the one with the blue tombs... I remember, I remember. It's there that she's buried. Definitely."
> "What are you talking about?" my brother Abdul almost shouted. "*Dada* was buried next to Grandfather, in the main Cemetery, Daud."
> "That's not true, you liar!" replied cousin O, becoming heated. "I'm older than you and I remember Mogadishu better. They buried Grandmother at the Sheikh Sufi."
> "Balls! You don't remember anything about Mogadishu... you were always shut up with your books and your learning. You didn't see the world. I, on the other hand, got around in Mogadishu. I was a little rascal. It's no coincidence that they called me the barbarian. I used to bunk off school. Those streets were my classroom. That city entered into me. I remember it better than you. I could even draw it for you. There you go, I could draw you a beautiful picture of Mogadishu, right now." [31]

From this moment of challenge and of conflicted memories, the three adults in the room begin to draw a map of Mogadishu together: Mogadishu before 1991. They all agree on points and roads such as Maka al Mukarama, the major road through the city. But they each proffer different elements that they either remember or prioritise differently. Cousin O adds the Xamar Cinema, his favourite, positioning it relative to the former parliament, and remembers how he would go there with his friends. Abdul adds the primary school, then

[31] Scego, 21- 22.

called Guglielmo Marconi[32] and renamed Yaasin Cusman.[33] Igiaba herself is put in charge of the restaurants and the hospitals. 'Certainly I was more familiar with Rome... Nonetheless, in this map was a part of my roots.'[34] In the process of making the map, memories return. 'I suddenly remembered the light wind of Mogadishu.'[35] The map-making process, which thrills Igiaba's nephew, Deq, begins to transform each character's memories into physical, felt-tip markings on paper, into a collective remembering of a city, itself rendered textually in the novel.

Some things take precedence, some have changed; some no longer exist. Attention is drawn to the Italian colonial names: the 'bella fregatura' (pretty swindle) which taught Somali subjects of the successive Italian regimes that their ancestors were Romans, that their history was white, in Scego's description.[36]

As the map becomes more complex and colourful, little Deq, Abdul's son who was born in the UK, asks two questions that will frame the rest of the book.

"Does this city exist, mummy?" Deq asked Nura.[37]

The map, as it is described, as the reader must imagine it, is partial, subjective, but it is also a document of a city frozen in time, a blended city of the 1960s and 1970s and perhaps the 1980s, but frozen before the two decades of devastating civil war which would destroy much of it and force many of its citizens, Scego's family included, into exile. It is an imagined

[32] Guglielmo Marconi: Italian inventor- helped invent the radio, born 1874, Bologna, died 1937, Rome
[33] Yasin Osmaan Kenadid: Writer, political activist, born 1919, Hobyo, Somalia: died 1988, Rome.
The primary school has formerly been named by the Italian coloniser after an Italian hero, and renamed, presumably as an act of decolonisation, for a Somali one.
[34] Scego, 29.
[35] Scego, 29.'
[36] Ibid., 28
[37] Ibid. p. 31

city which will exist as long as memories can recreate it, and as such, it is a 'site of memory.'[38] It is also the same Mogadishu which exists on the site now, although many names have been changed, businesses (such as Igiaba's hospitals and restaurants) closed, and buildings destroyed. And finally, for this family, it is a city of hope: the city that exiles carry around with them, to which they desire one day to return, and which they are now collectively performing for little Deq, whose next question directly questions Igiaba's own identity.

> "Is it your city, Aunt Igiaba?"
> I didn't know how to reply. The question was surprising. Unexpected. An ambush.[39]

The rest of the novel will attempt to map what Igiaba's city *is*. Months later, after the protagonist has returned to her flat in Rome, she begins to make a new map, with its construction once again described in colourful, material terms.

> The post-its seemed perfect to me. I took an orange one. A warm colour, welcoming, one which augured well. Ideal to begin an adventure. I wrote onto it in block capitals, very big: ROME.[40]

Each chapter describes one of the post-it notes: a place which Igiaba considers important to build up *her* city. And the list of points on her map will each bring up a story which reveals the inextricable network of connections between Italy and Somalia and the other former colonies. The question of mapping is crucial to *La mia casa è dove sono*, but the maps are ultimately presented as text. A lengthy appendix provides some information on the historical context and a timeline of Italian involvement in the Horn of Africa, but the novel functions to render a map (felt-tips, post-its and all) as a text.

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[38] Nora, *Realms of Memory*.
[39] Ibid., . 31.
[40] Scego, 36.

Palimpsests and Mapping

Igiaba's reaction to Deq's second question is to make her own map, a map which delights in its transience, flexibility and mobility, and which places Mogadishu squarely in the centre of Rome, with the effect not only of asserting the presence of Somali people within the city, but also of breaking down the essential colonial categories of centres and margins. The result is a messy, fluid map of two cities linked by history, whose relationships are contingent and shift over time. 'I didn't want a piece of paper: I wanted something temporary and separable. The post-its seemed perfect to me.'[41] The crumpled map of Mogadishu is pinned on the wall; the post-it notes are stuck up around it, starting with the bright orange-coloured "ROMA". 'I traced lines, contours, shadows. What emerged was a little girl's drawing.'[42] The reader is invited into this drawing process, an optimistic, childlike re-creation of Rome. Throughout the novel, new layers are added chapter by chapter, superimposing the protagonist's memories and emotions about her city over historical stories and family tales. The map can only be imagined by the reader, who thus layers it over the Rome s/he knows, interacting with the text to create a new map.

This conscious layering is implicitly theorised several times, the most striking instance perhaps being Chapter 3, which begins with a post-it note describing the church at *Piazza Santa Maria Sopra Minerva*. The church itself can be read as a palimpsest, 'erected on the site of an ancient temple erroneously attributed to the goddess Minerva Calcidica.'[43] To Igiaba, it calls to mind that 'we women have had the force to overcome the heinous

[41] Scego, *La mia casa è dove sono*, 36.
[42] Scego, 37.
[43] Scego, 57.

traditions of silence.'[44] With this short introduction she sets up a connection between the historic erasures and superimpositions which have made contemporary Rome[45] and the violence and suffering which is mapped onto women's bodies, and she continues to elaborate on this through the story of her mother's life. In Italy in particular, the conceptual gap between that which happened in the colonies and the commonly understood history of the peninsula is notable and little discussed.

> Historian Angelo Del Boca has defined the process of silencing, omitting, and concealing evidence regarding the violent acts perpetrated by the Italian army against the colonised people as a deliberate attempt, on the part of the Italian government, to rehabilitate the national image that had been damaged by the events of World War II. Italy's colonial campaigns included land expropriations, the forced removal of masses of people, the creation of internment camps, the ruthless and inhuman military retaliation against resistance movements, the use of poison gas against civilians, and the enforcement of apartheid measures between Italians and Africans.[46]

The mapping process in Scego's novel both reveals that which is hidden: the dark history of Italy in Somalia which is not taught in schools and is erased under layers of nationalist mythmaking 'Italiani: brava gente', and the common perception of Italy as a country of emigration not immigration. The image of a palimpsest created by the narrator's layers of paper and post-it notes is apt to describe her project: not to contest the ideas that are already there, but to add new layers of truth.

Igiaba's mother, born into a nomadic family in the bush in Somalia, has had to 're-map' her life three times.

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[44] Scego, 58.
[45] With its famous ancient history and as the modern-day centre of the Roman Catholic church, the 'eternal city' contains perhaps the most famous and numerous examples of such superimposing of any city in Europe.
[46] Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo, eds., *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 7.

> Yes, re-map. Not reconstruct, not renovate, but re-map. She drew out a new personal geography for herself. She had to trace new lines, new margins, different curves. The space around her was changing once again.[47]

These times were when she experienced Female Genital Mutilation, when she left the nomadic life to live in Mogadishu, and finally when she was obliged to flee Somalia for Italy. This almost cinematic description, of the space around one changing, is thus applied to both trauma and travel. The presentation of the hardships of a life in exile – not able to understand the midwives when she gave birth again, missing the children she has left in Somalia, having her name changed by the authorities – takes the form not of loss, but of another layer added onto the map. Later when Igiaba herself visits her cousins in Somalia and they ask why she hasn't had FGM, her mother's experience forms her own protection. '"Mamma doesn't want it," was the suit of armour which shielded me.'[48] It is implicit that the temple to the Virgin Mary built (seemingly) on top of the temple to Minerva represents how women build on each other's strength. Like the Piazza, Igiaba's own body is presented as a palimpsest: a text written over her mother's older text, and written this time without the violence that her mother suffered.

> My mother's will and her experience of pain permitted me to be a complete woman, with all my organs in the right place. That's why I feel myself to be a map of my mother. She drew me whole, without omissions or "cuts".[49]

The chapter on Trastevere[50] also experiments with a blend of textual, personal and geographical palimpsests. Now Igiaba goes there to 'see friends, to enjoy herself'.[51] But she

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[47] Scego, *La mia casa è dove sono*, 63.
[48] Scego, 69.
[49] Scego, 69–70.
[50] Trastevere, literally, *across the Tiber*, is a fast-gentrifying and 'hip' area, where new boutiques and bars are filling the previously run-down medieval stone buildings.
[51] Scego, *La mia casa è dove sono*, 115.

recounts how in the 1980s she and her mother, poverty-stricken and short of food, would join a queue of Somalis, 'and then Filipinos, Eritreans, Cabo Verdeans, Roma, and even a few Italians'[52] to wait for a food distribution organised by a church-based charity.

This chapter, Chapter Six, is introduced with a few lines from a poem by Gloria Anzaldùa.

> We are the holy relics,
> the scattered bones of a saint
> the best loved bones of Spain.
> We seek each other.[53]

As Scego explains, the Somali diaspora resembles these holy relics scattered across the world, which her map seeks to re-assemble.

> On the map I draw a human skeleton sitting on the globe. At last, the bones have been reconstructed. I draw the hope that this might happen soon. [54]

Once again, her mapping project combines several different places and times, while remaining grounded in Trastevere, Rome. As Paynter observes,

> Scego's mapping has a more than personal function: it is an act of recall for the collective, revising the notion of "acts of personal remembering" as "fundamentally social and collective" to suggest how individual remembering can affect available public memories.[55]

Filling the Blank Spaces with 'Meaning'

Among the places and monuments described in *Mia casa* there are also blank spaces, such as the spot in Piazza di Porta Capena where the looted *Stele di Axum* stood until it was

[52] Scego, 120.
[53] Gloria Anzaldùa, 'Holy Relics' cited in Scego, 114.
[54] Scego, 114.
[55] Eleanor Paynter, "The Spaces of Citizenship: Mapping Personal and Colonial Histories in Contemporary Italy in Igiaba Scego's La mia casa è Dove Sono (My Home Is Where I Am)," *The European Journal of Life Writing* VI (2017): 152.

returned to Ethiopia in 2002. Like the protagonists of *La Seine était rouge*, Igiaba searches for meaning in absence, in the blank spot on the busy traffic island.

> Today in this place there is nothing. I go forward, blind, into this abyss. Cars, so that they don't lose heart, make a wide circle around this empty space. Each time I pass by it, I think that this place should be filled with meaning.[56]

Elsewhere in the novel, she re-centres the city, focusing on the places which hold meaning for Somali Romans. In October 2003, before such events became tragically commonplace, a boat carrying Somali refugees sank in the Mediterranean. Thirteen bodies were brought ashore at Lampedusa. The Somali residents of Rome successfully lobbied the city's mayor to hold a state funeral (one of a small number which took place in the early years of the Libya-Sicily migrant boat route), which Igiaba describes attending in Piazza del Campidoglio.[57]

> The then-mayor, Walter Veltroni, had replied to the Somali community's request for help to hold a funeral service for that unlucky thirteen. Not one of us wanted to see those bodies buried without the reading of a sura and the cries of a woman. And for the first time in years, an invisible community like ours dug its heels in. We, who had never asked anyone of that Italy that colonised us, that day we cried out our rights. It was the first time. The voice came out fragmented and stammering. But in one way or another, it came out. It made itself heard.[58]

Rendered visible in their collective grief, the Somali community gathers in the square to watch the thirteen coffins carried in. For once, they feel that Italy has recognised their presence and offered them a kind of equality.

> On that day, however, it was a different Italy. A beautiful, healthy Italy. An Italy which knew how to turn the pain of others into its own. An Italy which still had a soul. [59]

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[56] Scego, 75.
[57] Campidoglio, or the Capitoline Hill, is a major historical site and tourist attraction, housing, *inter alia*, the Italian Senate.
[58] Scego, *La mia casa è dove sono*, 100.
[59] Scego, 101.

Even the statues such as Mark Aurelius are 'supporting us with his friendly aspect.'[60] However, for this chapter the map entry is not Campidoglio, but the unappealing 1950s main station of Rome, Termini. The centre of Igiaba's Rome is unquestionably Termini.

> But according to strict logic, to my own logic, that funeral would have taken place at Termini station [...] That was the place for it. The only place in Rome we could really call home.[61]

Beyond the role of a main station in receiving new arrivals from Somalia – and taking leave of migrants departing for the UK, Germany and other parts of the diaspora – Termini is described as a key centre for shopping, eating and socialising with other Somali people scattered around the big city (see section 1 above). The novel also romanticises the station, imbuing it with a personality and the power to make or break a migrant's dream.

> 'At Termini, even if everything seems difficult, even if there are some who suffer enormously (I'm thinking of homeless people) you have the impression that a train will carry you away from all the pain. That's why on the map, I draw trains with angels' wings. It's true, the important thing is to have wishes.'[62]

Thus the novel recreates the spaces and landmarks of Rome, while showing how the contingency of a migrant's life requires a recentering, a shift in the way the city is understood, which of necessity 're-draws' the map. In the words of Huggan:

> The role of cartography [...] consists rather in the implementation of a series of creative revisions which register the transition from a colonial framework within which the writer is compelled to recreate and reflect upon the restrictions of colonial space to a postcolonial one in which he or she acquires the freedom to engage in a series of 'territorial disputes' that implicitly or explicitly acknowledge the relativity of modes of spatial (and by extension, cultural) perception.[63]

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[60] Scego, 100.
[61] Scego, 102.
[62] Scego, 97.
[63] Huggan, "Chapter 1: Decolonizing the Map: Postcolonialism, Poststructuralism and the Cartographic Connection," 30.

The places that previous maps made important are revealed as irrelevant to those trying to make a living in the new city, and erased from the map.

> What did the Piazza di Spagna have to do with us? Or the Campo dei Fiori? No one in those areas could embrace you or slap you down like Termini Station could. The centre, for Somalis, was here. Here was were real life began. For these reasons, many people I knew only needed a basic knowledge of the city of Rome. The place where you slept, the place where you worked, and Termini where everything happened, where life held you tenderly or spat in your face. For many, Rome hardly mattered. The one true star was that run-down station.[64]

Re-historicising the Black and African presence in Rome

The final chapter of *La mia casa è dove sono*, 'Being Italian for me', attempts to answer the opening question of the novel: 'Who am I?' As the book's title implies, Igiaba does not see her identity as bound up with a specific place, but insists on its hybridity and mobility. Moving around the city, she has built up fleeting pictures which we are asked to imagine as a map of 'her city'. '"Rome is the best city to go walking," [my father] told me, "If you get lost you always find your way again."'[65] The map is not fixed or clear, but it functions as a guide, as the city itself does: happy to 'get lost', Igiaba knows she will not be lost for long.

However in conjunction with these optimistic imaginings come descriptions of racism experienced in Rome, of the imprints that a fascist education in Somalia has left on her father, of the difficulties of a life in exile. Igiaba identifies with the 'elefantino di Bernino', a statue in Piazza Santa Maria Sopra Minerva. On seeing it as a child she was confused by its evident displacement in the middle of a busy Rome square. 'I remember that I asked "But

[64] Scego, *La mia casa è dove sono*, 103–4.
[65] Scego, 50.

are we in Somalia?"'[66] Like the elephant she feels displaced from a homeland she was not born in.

It is important to note in conclusion that while this chapter has discussed mapping and re-mapping in a postcolonial context, *Mia casa* also employs the discourse of Black solidarity to challenge Italian stereotypes. Malcolm X, another Muslim who 're-mapped' his life through autobiography, is mentioned twice, and one of the more cheerful stories concerns her father as a young student in Rome, being paid special attention by Nat King Cole as one of the only other black people in the audience, a 'miracle' which leads her to believe 'That Rome really might be a magical city.'[67] Thus Scego moves outside of the Italian relationship with its former colony, establishing bonds of solidarity with Black Americans, with Muslims, and presenting her case against Italian racism in the context of a multicultural, hybrid and multi-coloured modernity.

> It wasn't just about the ancient Romans and the Gauls, it wasn't just the *latinorum* and the Greek *agora*. There was also ancient Egypt and the incense gatherers of the Land of Punt, or in other words of our own Somalia. There were the kingdoms of Ashanti and Bambara. She wanted to make me proud of my black skin and of the land which we had to leave because overwhelming forces forced us out.[68]

There are several passing references to the practices of her Islamic faith, to the displacement she experienced in Somalia, to her passion for the Roma football team. The protagonist Igiaba refuses to simplify her identity to fit in with the expectations of an Italian

[66] Scego, 59.
[67] Scego, 56.
[68] Scego, 154.

society conceptualised as white and as homogenous. Instead, as she re-maps the city, she insists on its plurality and changeability. 'In a certain way, Italy is Babel too.'[69]

History, Memory and Ownership of the Narrative: Writing onto the City in *La Seine était rouge*[70]

> *" Des secrets, ma fille, des secrets, ce que tu ne dois pas savoir, ce qui doit être caché, ce que tu apprendras, un jour, quand il faudra."*[71]
>
> *One thing strikes in the (disproportionately small) memorialization that is made of the event every year: the supposed spatial and temporal punctuality of its occurrence […] what further research reveals on the contrary, is that the massacre occurred in a multiplicity of spatialities and temporalities.*[72]

Leïla Sebbar, the oldest of the authors in this project, was born in Aflou near Oran, Algeria, in 1941, to an Algerian father and French mother who had met at university in Bordeaux. She left Algeria in 1961, during the Algerian war of independence, to study literature at Aix-en-Provence. While completing a PhD in Paris, she became a regular writer for *Sans-Frontières* review, 'on immigration and the third world', and her first novel was published in 1981, following a series of essays on race, migration and the experiences of North Africans in France.[73]

Over a thirty-five-year career, Sebbar has published more than 15 novels, as well as short stories, young adult fiction and memoirs. Some are set in Algeria, but most deal with the

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[69] Scego, 159.
[70] Sebbar, *La Seine Etait Rouge*. [All translations are my own.]
[71] Sebbar, 9.
[72] Leopold Lambert, "Chrono-Cartography of the October 17, 1961 Massacre of Algerians in Paris", The Funambulist, 22nd May, 2017, https://thefunambulist.net
[73] information: http://clicnet.swarthmore.edu/leila_sebbar/bibliographie/index.html among others- Sebbar, *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square*; "Leïla Sebbar. Journal d'une Femme à Sa Fenêtre Suites 26-63," accessed September 24, 2019, http://www.leila-sebbar.fr/; Beatriz Mangada Cañas, "Leïla Sebbar, l'écriture En Français Comme Passage Entre Enjeux Identitaires," *Çedille. Revista de Estudios Franceses* 9 (2013): 347–58.

experience of exile and migration, life in Paris for North Africans and their children. Her latest novel, *Mon Cher Fils* (*My Dear Son*) turns the trans-Mediterranean journey around, to describe the return home of an older Algerian after a lifetime spent in France. Her works, many of which feature a female teenage protagonist, return again and again to the themes of disconnection between different generations of migrants, the difficulty of maintaining Algerian and Muslim traditions in Paris,[74] and the deep scars left by French colonialism in North Africa, as well as the traumatic memories of the Algerian War of Independence and the Algerian Civil War throughout the 1990s.

When the Seine Was Red

La Seine était rouge is a short novel, written in 1996, and one of Leïla Sebbar's most overtly political fictional works, which followed an eponymous essay describing the police massacre of peacefully protesting Algerians in Paris in 1961. It is structured into short chapters of a couple of pages, each but the last set in a different area of (greater metropolitan) Paris, interspersed with testimonies on the events of October 1961 by various witnesses.

Amel's mother and grandmother, the book begins, always told her that she would find out the truth 'when the time comes' ('le jour dit').[75] The truth referred to here is about what happened on October 16th and 17th, 1961, when Amel's parents, her uncles and her grandmother were among thousands of Algerians[76] to demonstrate in Paris against racist

[74] In *Fatima*, for example, there is a long description of how men from the *banlieues* acquire and slaughter sheep to celebrate Eid-al-Fitr, 'lorsque les hommes de la famille se rassemblaient pour aller acheter des moutons à des fermiers du côté de la Normandie.' (As the men of the family gathered to go and buy sheep from farmers down Normandy way).' Sebbar, *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square*, 247.
[75] Sebbar, *La Seine Etait Rouge*, 9. 'on the right day'
[76] Later research has estimated the number of Algerians demonstrating that day at around 30,000. Jean-Luc Einaudi, *La Bataille de Paris 17 Octobre 1961* (Paris: Seuil, 1991), 183.

treatment and the curfew imposed on Arab men (as a government response to the Algerian war of independence 1954-62). On October 17th, 1961, acting on the orders of Paris Chief of Police Maurice Papon, police opened fire on Algerians demonstrating peacefully, killing an estimated 200-300 people. Many of the bodies were thrown into the Seine or dumped outside Paris by police agents.[77]

Amel wants to know now. And thus the novel opens with a obstruction, a blockage, in the passing-down of family and community memory. Amel is now a 16-year-old student in Nanterre, the site of the *bidonville* in which her grandparents and parents were living in 1961, now completely transformed into a suburban working-class area with a 1960s university campus. The traces of the large shantytown have been erased under social housing developments such as the one in which her grandfather now lives, in a new house near the university. Likewise, as the novel reveals, memories of the events of 1961 will not be easy for her to access: at different scales, from her close family to the official state-sanctioned French national memory, the treatment of Algerians in France during the Algerian War of Independence is downplayed, obscured and even actively concealed.[78]

The mother and grandmother acknowledge that they cannot keep their 'secrets' forever, but that they will be revealed 'quand il faudra' (when it's necessary).

> "That day will come, don't worry about that, that day will come and it will not be happy for you…"[79]

[77] Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962* (New York Review of Books, 2011), 500.
[78] Hervé Hamon and Patrick Rotman, *Les porteurs de valises: la résistance française à la guerre d'Algérie* (Albin Michel, 1982), 372–74; Bernard Droz and Évelyne Lever, *Histoire de la guerre d'Algérie: 1954-1962* (Éditions du Seuil, 1982), 234–35.
[79] Sebbar, *La Seine Etait Rouge*, 9.

The rest of the short novel will reveal the truth to Amel, but it will also explore the futility of her mother's attempt to conceal it. Within the city in which she has grown up and which she considers her home (unlike the mother and grandmother who talk, half in French, half in Arabic, of 'le pays' ('the old country')), Amel will have a violent and hidden history suddenly revealed to her, *written onto the city*.

This revelation begins to unfold when her mother is interviewed by Louis, a young French filmmaker in love with Amel,[80] for his documentary on those events. Louis knows Amel, importantly, because his mother, a middle-class French sympathiser to the Algerian cause, was in prison with her grandmother, Lalla, during the Franco-Algerian conflict. At Louis' family home she meets Omer, an Algerian journalist and asylum seeker, and together they 'go missing', embarking on a tour of the sites of Paris significant to 1961, with Omer graffiti-ing memorial plaques to the Algerians who died at the hands of French police and Harkis. [81] They spend these days exploring each other's identities as they explore the capital: Omer gradually reveals the reasons he had to leave Algeria, following death threats as he worked as a journalist in Algiers. He is repeatedly cynical about Amel's sudden politicisation and dismissive about her in-between position as a second-generation descendant of Algerians, born in Paris, who has never been to Algeria and speaks Ancient Greek better than Arabic.

> "Are you sulking? Temperamental girls...! "No, no. I'm just not speaking, that's all." "Is it because I don't feel passionate about the Algerians of October 1961?" "Maybe. I don't understand why you don't want to know. You know nothing about these days and the ones that followed it, about

[80] Sebbar, 73.

[81] *Harki* is a general term for Algerian soldiers recruited to fight for the French, and also to work in police roles in France, where they were known for violence. After the war ended in 1921, the *harki* were often imprisoned or killed by the new Algerian government, while France tried to avoid taking responsibility for them. AFP, GEO. 'Guerre d'Algérie : qui sont les Harkis ?' Geo.fr, 20 September 2021. https://www.geo.fr/histoire/guerre-dalgerie-qui-sont-les-harkis-206329. (Accessed 6th October 2021)

> that moment of the war. You don't know anything, and you don't want to know anything. Maybe it's not important to you because nowadays, Algerians are killing Algerians? We don't know who, and we don't know why- is it because your own tragedy is more important to you than my mother's tragedy, and my grandmother's? Is that it?" "The history of the War of Liberation, the official Algerian history, I know it by heart, and it breaks my heart, do you understand?"[82]

The novel is driven forward by the loss of Amel's innocence as she pieces together the events which affected her. Amel is initially primarily concerned with her own family's history, Omer with the political situation in contemporary Algeria, and they frequently challenge each other to see how these different events fit together.

> "Have you been to Algeria? Do you know it?" "No. My dad says we'll go soon. In my room, I have a map of Algeria. I put red pins in it to mark the massacres..." "What for?" "To know."[83]

Yet the characterisation of Amel, minimal like all of Sebbar's characterisation, reveals connections between the different places and times recounted in the novel. She is a hybrid character, of Algerian descent yet ignorant of its language and culture; French but determined to uncover Algerian history; forward thinking and socially mobile yet preoccupied with the secret lives of her mother and grandmother. Thus she acts as an intermediary between the two Algerian wars, between the two countries, and between Omer and Louis.

Film-making, Témoinages and Narrative Voice

Throughout the novel, a number of different people reveal their varying perspectives on the conflict and on the massacre, and assign culpability to different actors. Many of these testimonies are apparently direct transcripts of interviews Louis has carried out for the

[82] Sebbar, *La Seine Etait Rouge*, 41–42.
[83] Sebbar, 30.

documentary he made on the events, including Amel's mother, Noria, but also a police officer, a French left-wing school student, a Harki, a brothel-owner, and an Algerian who narrowly escaped drowning in the Seine. The film, a documentary on the *porteur/ses de valises*, French sympathisers who ran messages and offered assistance to FLN agents and Algerian independence fighters, is completed at the start of the novel's chronology, and watched by Amel and Omer shortly after.[84] Three of the testimonies – the half-drowned Algerian, the police-officer and the bookshop owner – describe how the 'Seine was red', each using such similar wording to highlight the deliberation and performativity of the imaginary documentary film rendered as prose.

> In that spot the Seine was red, I'm sure of it, even if we couldn't see well, it was dark, it was raining. [85]

> Panic. Surely at the Saint-Michel bridge, the Seine was red. I didn't see its colour.[86]

> They found bodies, swept away by the Seine. Surely the Seine was red on that day, in the night you couldn't see.[87]

Six chapters are dedicated to Amel's mother's memories of her childhood, giving background on Algerian migration to France in the 50s and 60s, discussing poverty in rural North Africa under French rule, the *bidonvilles* (shanty-towns) in the Paris suburbs where mostly Algerians lived,[88] and emphasising the ways in which the histories of France and Algeria were connected under colonialism and continue to be so. While she was born

[84] Sebbar, 22.
[85] Sebbar, 100.
[86] Sebbar, 93.
[87] Sebbar, 48.
[88] Also housing migrants from Spain, Portugal and Morocco, these slums were at one point the largest in Europe. They were demolished at the end of the 60s as the Paris 'banlieues' were constructed, in large part to house migrant workers. The characters in the Nanterre bidonville, 'La Folie', mostly work in the nearby Peugeot car plant. The bidonville is also the site of violence between different factions of the Algerian war of Independence. Maffre, Laurent. *Demain, demain 1/ Nanterre, bidonville de la folie, 1962-1966*. Arles: Issy-les-Moulineaux: Actes Sud, 2012.

France, Noria's experience of the city as a child was limited to the *bidonville* until the day of the demonstration.

> I looked at my mother. She smiled at me. Her hand was warm. I had never seen Paris, this was Paris and I wasn't seeing anything. Only men, men like my father, with their hands on their heads.[89]

For Amel, to whom her mother has delayed telling the truth, her mother's lengthy testimonies on film to Louis represent a kind of betrayal.

> To her, her mother had said nothing, and she had spoken to Louis. For a long time. To her, never for longer than a minute and a half... And there was her mother talking, talking, talking, she never stopped, and she looked at Louis, filming her.[90]

The memories which the family has kept secret from Amel are revealed here in detail, but the interjected descriptions of the filming process create a barrier between the mother and Amel.

> "Others, today, assassinate, let the bodies rot where they lie, by the sides of roads, brothers, fathers, friends... enemies." Silence. A long silence that Louis has not cut [out].[91]

No clear reasons are given in the novel for why Noria has delayed telling her daughter the truth, but the contrast between the silence within the family unit and her loquacity to camera hint at the deep trauma which governs first and second Algerian survivors of October 1961: the retelling is not refused, but endlessly delayed, perhaps to protect Amel. It appears much easier to reveal the whole truth through the distancing lens of the camera.

[89] Sebbar, *La Seine Etait Rouge*, 46.
[90] Sebbar, 23.
[91] Sebbar, 34.

Watching Louis' film is the spark which initiates Omer and Amel's journey, but while they leave their own new traces on Paris, Louis is following in their footsteps, shooting new footage. Omer, who often acts as an external voice, critiquing French society from a firmly Algerian position, questions whether the film will have any effect.

> "You know what I think, it's that Louis, his film, it'll be a bust... Who wants to hear about that story, that day of the 17th October 1961? Who? Neither the French nor the Algerians, neither immigrants nor nationals... So... All that for nothing." [92]

Louis' film is to be entered in a festival, but Amel and Omer take a more direct approach to re-situating the events of October 1961 into Parisian memory.

Collective Memory Written Onto the City

La Seine était rouge mentions a large number of places across Paris (at least 13) by name, from the north-western suburbs of Nanterre to the bustling 18e *arrondissement*, the university streets of the West Bank to the Santé prison in the 13e, the Grande Arche of La Défense at the start of its redevelopment as the financial district to the tourist areas of the grand boulevards. Across this wide field runs the S-shaped curve of the river Seine, on several of whose bridges the events of October 1961 took place. While Louis' film suggests only the most basic idea of location (at the start of each testimony are simple descriptions such as 'intérieur jour'), Amel and Omer's journey across the city, described in more detail, connects the multiple locations of the events of October 1961. By the time of the novel's publication in the mid-1990s, some acknowledgement was forthcoming from the French state of the bloody events of the day, yet as Leopold Lambert observed in long piece

[92] Sebbar, 89.

mapping the events of that day, the true size of the demonstration and the police operation to suppress it has often been downplayed within official narratives.

> One thing strikes in the (disproportionately small) memorialization that is made of the event every year: the supposed spatial and temporal punctuality of its occurrence […] what further research reveals on the contrary, is that the massacre occurred in a multiplicity of spatialities and temporalities.[93]

By covering this terrain, not only do Amel and Omer physically situate themselves inside these historically-charged spatialities, they also perform an act of mapping which contrasts strongly to the dis-embodiment of Louis' project, contests the simplistic narrative of the events offered by the French government even in the 1990s, and renders the 'imagined' spaces real, at least within the boundaries posed by the fictional text.

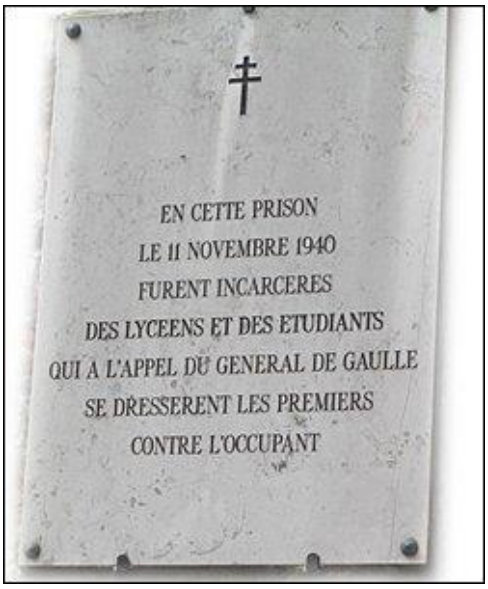

Figure 2: Plaque commemorating WWII résistants, La Santé Prison, Paris

Shortly after meeting, Amel and Omer find themselves by the notorious La Santé prison[94] in Paris, in the 13th Arrondissement.[95] On the wall, they see this plaque.

IN THIS PRISON
11 NOVEMBER 1940
UNIVERSITY AND SCHOOL STUDENTS WERE IMPRISONED
WHO AT THE CALL OF GENERAL DE GAULLE

[93] Leopold Lambert, "Chrono-Cartography of the October 17, 1961 Massacre of Algerians in Paris", The Funambulist, 22nd May, 2017, https://thefunambulist.net.

[94] The prison, built in 1867, would be well-known to a French reader. It has a colonial connection: from here prisoners were transferred to prison colonies in Guyana. It was also the site of several famous escapes. La Santé is notorious for prisoner suicides, poor conditions and overcrowding. (It has recently been closed for renovation).

[95] This is next to Louis' home but a long way from theirs! Amel and Omer live in working-class, ethnically diverse suburbs in the north-west of Paris. Louis, a young filmmaker, lives to the east of the left-bank universities, in a formerly working-class area now increasingly associated with students and creative workers.

WERE THE FIRST TO RISE AGAINST THE OCCUPIER[96]

Omer's response is to take out a can of red spray paint and write a new message underneath, the first of a series of graffiti which they will leave around the city:

1954- 1962
IN THIS PRISON
ALGERIAN RESISTANTS
WHO ROSE UP AGAINST THE FRENCH OCCUPIER
WERE GUILLOTINED[97]

Omer's action dramatically reveals the selectiveness of the apparently innocuous collective memory of the city of Paris. Together, he and Amel visit a series of 'lieux de mémoire', responding to the official markers of state-sponsored memory with new texts which bring private memory onto a public stage in a way that cannot easily be ignored. The city of Paris is thus *both history book and blank page*, and as Mortimer argues, Amel and Omer are making their own *sites of memory*.

> By creating plaques to commemorate historical events – first the death sentence carried out against Algerian nationalists in the Santé prison, the homage to victims of the massacre of October 17th, 1961 – Sebbar's protagonists create their own *lieux de mémoire*. These memory sites are equally material, symbolic, functional. They are durable, the red paint permeating the stone. They are symbolic, representing Algeria's loss of human life. They are functional, reminding all passersby of the historical event.[98]

Mortimer and others rightly connect Amel and Omer's graffiti with the *lieux de mémoire* coined and described by historian Pierre Nora in his three-volume history collection of the same name.

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[96] Sebbar, 20.
[97] Sebbar, 21-22 [my translation].
[98] Mildred Mortimer, "Probing the Past: Leïla Sebbar, La Seine Etait Rouge/The Seine Was Red," *The French Review* 83, no. 6 (2010): 7.

> *Lieux de mémoire* are created by a play of memory and history, an interaction of two factors that results in their reciprocal overdetermination. To begin with, there must be a will to remember.[99]

Notwithstanding the massive scope of his project, Nora was later criticised for the nationalist focus of the *lieux* he selected: often seen as espousing French republican values, Nora's 'polarization of history and memory' also takes a Eurocentric approach to how memory is recorded, and assumes a benevolence in the attitude of the authorities towards cementing public memory which is provably lacking from France's official memories of both colonial subjects and colonial conflicts. In his introduction to a new response to Nora's work, Michael Rothberg cites Perry Anderson:

> [T]he entire imperial history of the country, from the Napoleonic conquests through the plunder of Algeria under the July Monarchy, to the seizure of Indochina in the Second Empire, and the vast African booty of the Third Republic, becomes a *non-lieu* at the bar of these bland recollections.[100]

These *non-lieux*, or missing sites, are no fewer within mainland France than across the scope of its colonial influence: the *lieu de mémoire* is marked by its selection from infinite possibilities.

However, the sites pinpointed by Nora, including cemeteries, museums, public holidays, monuments, squares and statues, are noticeably reflected in the sites visited by Amel and Omer, revealing their importance to the way the city, as well as public memory, is constructed and understood. While Omer is unambiguously hostile to the existing

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[99] Nora, *Realms of Memory*, 19.
[100] Michael Rothberg, "Introduction: Between Memory and Memory: From Lieux de Mémoire to Noeuds de Mémoire," in *Noeuds de Mémoire: Multidirectional Memory in Postwar French and Francophone Culture*, Yale French Studies, 118/9 (Yale University Press, 2010), 5.

memorials, Amel, the 'in-between' character, frequently comments on their presence and their importance, as well as their direct relevance to October 1961.

> "Yet another Marianne! You like stone women dressed as warriors for peace... It's odd..." says Omer.[101]

Arguably the statues of Marianne, the female embodiment of the spirit of the French nation,[102] hold an appeal for Amel; she is the person to carry out their project of creating and amending *lieux de mémoire* not because she is Algerian, but because she is *both Algerian and French*, even if in the process she expresses some controversial opinions, such as when Omer tells her that the obelisk at Place de la Concorde was looted from Egypt by Napoleon:

> "That's enough acting like I'm responsible for it... Anyway, if it's Bonaparte who is, he was right, it's beautiful, the square is beautiful, everything's beautiful... and that hotel..." "You wanna go there?" "We can?" "Yes. Let's go."[103]

Amel and Omer's families do not know where they are: they are in the city but have 'vanished' from the map. They speak to people they think might have a memory of October 1961, but not in the careful and ordered way that Louis organises his documentary. They interact with different spaces in different ways: an argument starts when Amel wishes to visit Tati, the cut-price department store which is itself an icon of multicultural Paris. Their tour of the sites of October 1961 takes them to sites famous for other reasons. 'At each site

[101] Sebbar, *La Seine Etait Rouge*, 53.
[102] 'Marianne is a national symbol of the French Republic, a personification of liberty and reason, and a portrayal of the goddess of liberty.' Anne Marie Sohn, "Marianne Ou l'histoire de l'idée Républicaine Aux XIXè et XXè Siècles à La Lumière de Ses Représentations.," http://hist-geo.ac-rouen.fr/doc/bls/2004/marian.htm (Accessed 30th September 30, 2019).
[103] Sebbar, *La Seine Etait Rouge*, 64.

there is a figure or inscription that symbolizes the French nation.'[104] Amel repeatedly connects the two:

> Omer interrupts her. "Why are you reading me that?"
> "Firstly because Parisians, the people of Paris, resisted against the enemy, have you heard about the Paris Commune? And also because the statue was the meeting point for the Algerians on the 17th of October 1961. Who defended them when the cops charged at the Neuilly bridge? You've heard the stories, the panic, the fallen bodies, the wounded, the dead... Families in their Sunday best, baby carriages knocked over, lost shoes, adults, children..."[105]

Not only does the process of inscribing new memorials next to the existing ones highlight the institutional silence around the treatment of Algerian migrants in Paris, it shows a dialogue between what is presented or represented as important. As Banton points out, the novel reveals important connections between different forms and loci of memory.

> Memory, the novel also shows, is not only inter-generational as we have seen, but often multi-directional, and several references to the persecution of Jewish people show the inter-related nature of these memories with those of decolonization, and how narratives of empathy and / or political solidarity can be generated through exposure to both processes.[106]

When Sebbar was writing, these different memories were subject to much public debate. France has approximately 35,000 of memorials to the dead of World Wars I and II, yet by the late 1990s, there remained an uneasy silence around the Algerian War of Independence, with the names of the French dead still absent from the village memorials.[107] From the 70s,

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[104] Robyn Banton, "Dire, Voir, Savoir: Remembering the Paris Massacre in Leïla Sebbar's La Seine Était rouge," *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 18, no. 4 (August 8, 2014): 365, https://doi.org/10.1080/17409292.2014.938498.
[105] Sebbar, *La Seine Etait Rouge*, 42.
[106] Jim House, "Review of Leïla Sebbar, The Seine Was Red. Paris, October 1961: A Novel (Translated by Mildred Mortimer)," *H-France* 10, no. 7 (January 2010): 31.
[107] Daniel J. Sherman, "Art, Commerce, and the Production of Memory in France After World War I," in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), http://www.nyu.edu/classes/bkg/tourist/sherman.pdf.

France began to put up plaques in memory of French Jewish people deported to Nazi Germany, acting mostly at the instigation of the Jewish community .[108] However, it would not be until this century that plaques would admit the collaboration of the French authorities in the deportations by adding 'With the Collusion of the French Police' onto newer memorials. In Gironde, this collaboration happened under the administration of Maurice Papon, Chief of the Paris police in 1961, frequently referred to in *La Seine était rouge*.

La Seine était rouge garnered great critical interest. Anne Donadey's *Women Writing Worlds*, a study of Algerian francophone women writers, compares Leïla Sebbar with the other titan of the field, Assia Djebar ('the most preeminent and talented women writers of Algeria, with prolific literary careers which stretch over several decades')[109] and devoted a chapter to the short novel.

By the time that Mildred Mortimer's English translation[110] was published in 2008, memory studies and the theory of commemoration had gained much traction, particularly within postcolonial studies. In France, the subject became important around the same time of the novel's initial publication, as lobbying grew for more formal recognition of WWII

[108] Northern France was occupied by Nazi Germany from 1940 to 1944, while the southern part (Vichy France) retained nominal independence until 1942. In both areas, while there was always resistance against the occupiers, there was significant collaboration by authorities, police and politicians (as well as businesses and individuals) with Nazi rule. Around 77,500 Jewish people (both French and refugees from elsewhere in Europe) died, the majority from deportation to Nazi concentration camps. To this day, France has an uneasy relationship with this 'collabo' past, which has been described as 'Vichy Syndrome' (Henri Rousso, cited by Mortimer, "Probing the Past.").

[109] Carine Bourget, *Recasting Postcolonialism. Women Writing Between Worlds by Anne Donadey (Review)*, vol. 14, Women in French Studies, (Women in French Association, 2005), 2. 'les écrivaines les plus proéminentes et talentueuses d'Algérie, avec des carrières littéraires prolifiques qui s'étendent sur plusieurs décennies'.

[110] Sebbar has also been translated into Arabic, German, Italian, Catalan, Dutch and Hebrew.

collaboration with the Nazis, particularly around the French police's involvement in the deportation of Jewish people, and the names of French conscripts fallen in Algeria slowly began to be added to the ubiquitous war memorials which stand in every village. Maurice Papon, frequently named in the novel as the Paris Chief of Police behind the slaughter of October 1961, had been arrested in 1981 for Holocaust crimes.

> Sebbar's novel originally appeared at a quiet time in which there was at most faltering resurgence of the public memory of October 1961 in France, after a peak in commemorative activity around 1991. This situation inspired the timely and ultimately crucial decision by campaigners to publicize Papon's role in the 17 October 1961 violence at his trial in Bordeaux in 1997-1998 relating to his role as Secretary General of the Gironde Préfecture during the Vichy regime.[111]

After the longest trial in French history, he was finally convicted in 1998 (two years after the novel's publication), an important moment for the small but growing movement within France which demanded that colonial atrocities and the Algerian War of Independence should also be commemorated (The chef in the Bonne-Nouvelle restaurant emphasises this connection, telling Amel and Omer: 'I learnt later that the prefect of the Paris police, that was Papon, the same civil servant who signed off the deportation of Jews arrested in Gironde.'[112]). This is why Omer's spray-painted 'memorials' are usually daubed under existing plaques: *La Seine était rouge* reveals that the problem is not what is commemorated, but what is ignored, forgotten, or forced out of the realm of history into private memory. Following Pierre Nora, as set out in the introduction to this chapter, postcolonial memory studies question *lieux de memoire*, looking for the *lieux* which are

[111] House, "Review of Leïla Sebbar, The Seine Was Red. Paris, October 1961: A Novel (Translated by Mildred Mortimer)," 1.
[112] Sebbar, *La Seine Etait Rouge*, 78. 'J'ai appris plus tard que le préfet de Police de Paris, c'était Papon, le même fonctionnaire qui a signé la déportation des Juifs arrêtés en Gironde.'

forgotten and seeking to re-establish them as important sites, in a 'piecing together' process Anne Donadey describes as 'anamnesis'.[113]

Omer's message on the Hôtel Crillon includes a direct reference to Papon's responsibility, implying a widening of the focus of their counter-memorialisation to include the silence on French collaboration in WWII.

> HERE ALGERIANS WERE SAVAGELY BEATEN BY THE POLICE OF PREFECT PAPON 17 OCTOBER 1961[114]

The reader imagines the events of October 1961 as being literally marked onto the city, and thus reaching a wider audience than the novel itself, as Omer scrawls his 'memorials' in red paint. In fact, despite the aforementioned weaknesses in Nora's *Lieux de Mémoire*, this active process of mapping and remapping are justified by Nora's own call to action:

> [W]hen memory is no longer everywhere, it will not be anywhere unless one takes the responsibility to recapture it through individual means.[115]

La Seine était rouge: Political Interventions from the Text to the Streets

The processes of mapping and re-writing history onto the city described in the novel bring Algeria and the Algerian *banlieues* of Paris directly into the centre of the city, conflating and confusing the centres and the margins of the French colonial world in a textual and geographic act of defiance.

> The convergence of the demonstrators in the most public sites of the Parisian landscape thus writes a text of defiant visibility and presence on a mass scale: the Algerians and FLN supporters emerging out of metro stations 'from the suburbs, from the shantytowns' (Stora 1991: 95)

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[113] Anne Donadey, "Between Amnesia and Anamnesis: Re-Membering the Fractures of Colonial History," *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature* 23, no. 1 (January 1, 1999), https://doi.org/10.4148/2334-4415.1457.
[114] Sebbar, *La Seine Etait Rouge*, 68. "ICI DES ALGÉRIENS ONT ÉTÉ MATRAQUÉS SAUVAGEMENT PAR LA POLICE DU PRÉFET PAPON LE 17 OCTOBRE 1961."
[115] Nora, *Realms of Memory*, 16.

> refused the boundaries between centre and periphery, rejecting their marginal positions and making their existences manifest in the heart of the city.[116]

The novel insists on the continuing and inevitable connection between independent Algeria and postcolonial France, through the characters but also through the repeated references to the Algerian civil conflict of the 1990s, from which Omer is a refugee and which is continuing during the time of the novel.

> The Franco-Algerian relation, the novel seems to be saying, is a permanent but shifting one: the interrelations and cross-fertilizations between the two spaces should not obscure the differences and misunderstandings, past and present.[117]

This insistence, and the huge importance of memory of place in the novel, reflects the aims of the work: to decolonise the French metropole, to literally write forgotten histories onto the walls of Paris, to create a radical monument to the fallen Algerian migrants *in writing*; one which can, through the subtleties of multiple narrative strands, question the factuality of a simple textual monument.

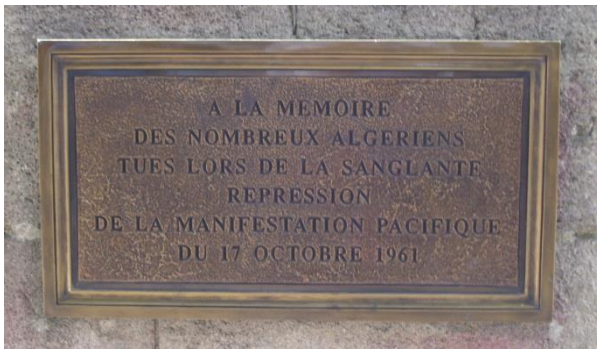

Figure 3: Plaque placed on Pont St Michel 2001

The publication of the novel in 1996 certainly contributed to new acts of official and collective remembering: in 2001 a small plaque was placed by the town hall of Paris on the Pont St-Michel, the bridge from which the bodies of Algerian protestors were thrown into the Seine.[118]

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[116] Dawn Fulton, "Elsewhere in Paris: Creolised Geographies in Leïla Sebbar's *La Seine Était rouge*," *Culture, Theory and Critique* 48, no. 1 (April 2007): 32, https://doi.org/10.1080/14735780701293482.
[117] Jim House 2010, http://www.h-france.net/vol10reviews/vol10no7house.pdf.
[118] TO THE MEMORY *(cont. below)*

This may have also been influenced by the graffiti which appeared on the bridge in 1998: 'They drown Algerians here.'[119] It's interesting to note that this graffiti, apparently a re-writing of graffiti on the bridge in 1961, which had been quickly erased and of which there is no photograph,[120] appeared two years *after* the publication of Sebbar's novel. This may just be coincidental: the 1990s saw a new demand for acknowledgement of the crimes of French colonialism, and specifically for state recognition of this massacre on French soil. But perhaps this fictional work, which describes how forgotten histories might be inscribed back onto the city, found its text leaving the page, to appear in bold red paint on the walls of Paris.

Figure 4: 'They drown Algerians here'

OF THE NUMEROUS ALGERIANS
KILLED DURING THE BLOODY REPRESSION
OF THE PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATION
OF THE 17TH OF OCTOBER 1961.

[119] More information: http://www.cairn.info/revue-geneses-2002-4-page-140.htm and http://www.arpla.fr/public/?tag=algerien

[120] Leopold Lambert, "Chrono-Cartography Of The October 17, 1961 Massacre Of Algerians In Paris," *The Funambulist* (blog), May 22, 2017, https://thefunambulist.net/history/chrono-cartography-october-17-1961-massacre-algerians-paris.

Lost and Found in the London of *The Silent Minaret*

> *History [...] is the only science in which human beings step before us in their totality. Under the rubric of history one is to understand not only the past, but the progression of events in general; history therefore includes the present.*[121]

London, the summer of 2003. A heatwave transforms the city, slowing it down, casting a new light on the stone temples to its colonial history, bringing the South closer to the "Heart of Empire". The Iraq War has begun despite mass popular dissent, and Blair's government is faced with the divisions implanted across the 'multicultural' city by a new suspicion of the Other, particularly of Muslims, post-9/11. Kagiso, a young black South African man, has come to the city to pack up the life of his adoptive brother, Issa, who has been missing since the first bombardments of Baghdad on the 20th of March, 2003.

Ishtiyaq Shukri's first novel is set in the torpid, uneasy climate of the War on Terror, and focuses on the anxiety of packing up the life of someone who has 'disappeared', who might be alive or dead, against a background of South African history. Issa, a silent and studious man of South Asian origin, an activist during the final years of apartheid in South Africa, has been working in London towards a PhD on the history of the colonisation of the Cape, short extracts of which are cited throughout the novel.[122]

Certain critical responses to Ishtiyaq Shukri's *The Silent Minaret* view it as a 'South African' novel, or focus on the international and 'cosmopolitan' strands within the novel.[123] However

[121] Auerbach, cited in Shukri, *The Silent Minaret*, 2006, 63.
[122] It is strongly implied that Issa is studying for his PhD at a Russell Square University much like SOAS.
[123] M. Neelika Jayawardane, "'Forget Maps': Documenting Global Apartheid and Creating Novel Cartographies in Ishtiyaq Shukri's *The Silent Minaret*," *Research in African Literatures* 45, no. 1 (2014): 1–23; Pallavi Rastogi, "International Geographics: Looking Out in Ishtiyaq Shukri's *The Silent Minaret*," *Research in African Literatures* 42, no. 3 (September 2011): 17–30, https://doi.org/10.2979/reseafrilite.42.3.17.

this section argues that while it certainly engages with both the history and the present of the South African Republic, *The Silent Minaret* is very much a work of migrant literature grounded in London and focalised around survival in the city. The minaret which gives the novel its title is of the North London mosque near Finsbury Park tube station, one of London's largest and longest established mosques, which gained a sudden notoriety in January 2003 after a police raid. *'At home, minarets declare God's love five times a day, but here they stand silent, like blacked-out lighthouses.'*[124] Issa's empty bedsit overlooks the mosque, and his elderly neighbour, Frances, describes watching the raid with him.

> "In the wee hours of that Monday morning, I was woken up in the middle of the night by helicopters, flying really low [...] That was when I saw them, two police helicopters flying directly over the mosque, with spotlights trained on the building, just there. The noise was deafening.[125]

Much as *La Seine était rouge* does with Paris, the novel follows characters moving around London, which becomes the locus of its critique of the uneasy power relations in a globalised world. The narrative is bookended by Kagiso's flights in and out of Heathrow, and mostly focalised through Kagiso as he puts together a picture of Issa's last days in London from the written scraps and clues he left behind.

Interspersed with this, long analepses trace Issa and Kagiso's childhood and student days during the final years of apartheid in South Africa from the different perspectives of the two young men. *The Silent Minaret* and its protagonist are fixated upon history: how it is made; who controls it, and is identified as *histioriographic metafiction* by Cleo Beth Theron, who uses its multiple metatexualities to show how the relationship between history, memory

[124] Shukri, *The Silent Minaret*, 2006, 76.
[125] Shukri, 170.

and power creates ideas of identity. Published in 2005, the book explores a new, post-millennial identity, suspicious of power, trying to piece together its own history from texts available on the internet, in the media, but also those physically present in the city. An extract from Issa's thesis emphasises the novel's insistence on the universal relevance of colonial histories within contemporary London, flipping rapidly from an external perspective to the metatext to the protagonist's voice:

> At a glance, she spots the changes, the redrafted sentences, the adapted opening, which now starts with a quote:
>
> > History is the science of reality that affects us most immediately, stirs us most deeply and compels us most forcibly to a consciousness of ourselves. It is the only science in which human beings step before us in their totality. Under the rubric of history one is to understand not only the past, but the progression of events in general; history therefore includes the present.
>
> The history of early European exploration and settlement at the Cape of Good Hope remains universally and eternally present.[126]

By examining these metatextual fragments which emerge as Kagiso moves around the city, this section investigates how *The Silent Minaret* maps London; firstly as a signifier of how the colonial relationship is but little changed by 2003, secondly as a platform from which a more balanced reading of contemporary South Africa is possible (but perhaps not achieved) and thirdly as a site of opportunity and possibility, yet also danger and oppression, for the novel's three young South African characters. *The Silent Minaret* shows the impossibility of leaving the past behind upon migration, as well as making connections between different historical oppressions and resistances in South Africa, the UK, Palestine and elsewhere.

> [Shukri] historicizes the dynamics of intercultural relations in South Africa in order to illustrate how the methodologies employed by previous European imperial ventures remain globally relevant and pertinent to the

[126] Auerbach, cited in Shukri, 63. [formatting here reflects original text].

> present, including the role that empire plays in racializing difference and bureaucratizing its demarcations.[127]

'Universally and Eternally Present': When Histories go Missing

Like *La mia casa è dove sono* and *La Seine était rouge*, *The Silent Minaret* is a novel about a search for something missing within a major European capital city. Unlike the other works, the missing subject is never found. Not only has Issa vanished, but throughout the novel references to the missing punctuate every scene, obliging the reader to confront the reasons for these disappearances. Katinka, Issa's South African friend in London, remembers going to see an exhibition on memory at the British Museum.

> "What did you think of the exhibition?" she asked.
> Issa did not look up. *It was as much about forgetting as remembering. Not a single thought spared for how the exhibits came to be here in the first place. Chronic amnesia.*[128]

One of the reasons which emerges for erasures and amnesia is nationalism: the novel repeatedly shows how one narrative drives out another, leaving silenced peoples and absent stories. In South Africa, the dominant (white) narrative during apartheid has formed an important part of Issa and Kagiso's education in a (white) private school. Even as a boy, Issa is sensitive to the violence of privileging one story over another, drawing Kagiso's attention to the erasure of his family from the report of an archaeological breakthrough.

> I remember Issa asking me from the corner of his mouth where my forefather's name was when my grandmother brought out the article during one of our visits to Taung. I shrugged my shoulders.
> *Missing*, he whispered. *Just like the Black Watch. Missing from history. Missing from archaeology. Like a missing link*.[129]

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[127] Jayawardane, "Forget Maps," 3.
[128] Shukri, *The Silent Minaret*, 2006, 143.
[129] Shukri, 29.

By the time he comes to London after graduating, this fascination with the missing has grown to almost a painful obsession for Issa. And Kagiso sees from his diaries that Issa draws little distinction between facts and names missing from history and the migrants unseen on the streets of the city.

> I am sitting on Derek Lane's bench tucked away in the affluent heart of this splendid city but, with my own accursed 'Sixth Sense', I only see the ogres – the hideous ones, the invisible ones. They roam the city, the unwanted ones, with vacant, distant stares. Absent and preoccupied, here only in unwanted, despised, brutalised foreign body; Europe's untouchables. [130]
> [...]
> How could I imagine that here, this, would be better? When they are still here? Did I learn to live with mocking reflections? Waiting on tables with an apron cut from a graduate's hood; mending shoes – my grandfather's trade – with the skilful hands of a surgeon.[131]

In Issa's sparsely decorated studio flat, Kagiso finds evidence of Issa's labour of restitution in the form of postcards, photographs, bookmarks, post-it notes. Perhaps most importantly, on his bookcase is the five-volume Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the justice body which aimed to collate and record human rights violations committed under apartheid, as well as symbolically drawing a line under the old régime. As Kagiso thumbs through it, attention is once again drawn to information which is privileged – 'searching it, like a telephone directory, for names, names he knows'[132] – and that which is missing, such as his own experience of the banned film on murdered activist Steve Biko, *Cry Freedom*.

> He has still not seen the film. To him, it remains a police seizure. That is what lives on, the film itself, a blank space, a smelly hole.[133]

[130] Shukri, 121.
[131] Shukri, 121. [emphasis in original].
[132] Shukri, 95.
[133] Shukri, 98.

Kagiso is now a documentary filmmaker working himself on the history of a South African region, but has chosen, somehow, to not see the film after the ban on it was lifted. These silences and absences, then, are not straightforwardly imposed, but spring from a pervasive, transnational culture, for which the novel offers several different possible explanations.

As he does in the museum, Issa regularly tells those around him to mistrust the absences they find in texts and documents. When he tells Kagiso that Asmara is the capital of Eritrea, Kagiso cannot find the country on the atlas.

> Forget about maps. They don't show things as they are. Asmara is in Eritrea.
> "Eritrea?" He scrutinises the map. "Don't see it."
> That's because it's still a dream. Maps don't show dreams either. Only nightmares.[134]

Eritrea is absent from the apparently authoritative text, but exists as an imagined place. This conversation takes place in the mid-1980s, before it became fully independent from Ethiopia in 1991. Thus Issa shows that temporality is crucial for understanding the absent, and may cause it to reveal itself, making visible the invisible.

Another explanation involves a critique of nationalism and nationalist values. The analyses which describe Issa's activism under apartheid only hint at a disappointment with the nation which followed it. Yet Katinka's memory of the moment when the new South African state was formed emphasises the potentials of blank space, of the absence of a dominant narrative or national symbol.

> She looked up at the empty flagpole, the muted brass band, not wanting the stateless moment to end.

[134] Shukri, 59.

> By the time the new flag reached the top of the flagpole (where the interim quickly – just one patriotic puff, one nationalistic sniff – became the addictively permanent) the endless, limitless possibilities of the stateless moment has already been diminished.[135]

As Theron observes, this reveals the potential inferred by blankness and absence, and the impossibility of beginning a new political system with a completely blank slate.

> The supposition that the new democracy is an entirely fresh start is a misperception facilitated by the historical discourse that promotes the myth of a complete termination of the problems of the previous regime; one which overlooks the continued existence of obstacles for many.[136]

It could be supposed that for South Africans, burdened with the historical traumas of racism and violence, and a not-so-long-ago system within which to be seen was to be categorised, the cosmopolitan anonymity of a 'world city' such as London might offer some opportunity for liberation. Yet in *The Silent Minaret*, as the minaret loses its function when it does not host the call to prayer, the anonymising forces are not so far from silencing or erasure, and it is indicated that Issa's disappearance has been made possible by the city in which he lives.

> "Johannesburg, 'ay?"
> "Yeah."
> "That where 'e was from, too?"
> "Yes."
> "See, I didn't even ask that much. Aint life funny sometimes?" he asks, searching the sky. "You can see someone every day of yer life and know nuffing abou' them, until they disappear. Tha's London for yer, mate."[137]

The passage reveals that living in London has diminished the loaded importance of Issa's racial identity and origins somewhat, yet the fruit seller to who Issa spoke every day has not

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[135] Shukri, 222.
[136] Cleo Beth Theron, "Reconstructing the Past, Deconstructing the Other: Redefining Cultural Identity through History and Memory in Ishtiyaq Shukri's *The Silent Minaret*," *English Studies in Africa* 57, no. 2 (July 3, 2014): 47, https://doi.org/10.1080/00138398.2014.963283.
[137] Shukri, *The Silent Minaret*, 2006, 118.

realised he is missing. Issa is one of a multitude, his individuality and his humanity eroded by the crowds.

Memory and Metatextuality

In a series of analepses, Kagiso, Issa and Katinka remember their youth in South Africa. The novel reveals how Issa and Kagiso became 'brothers', when Kagiso's mother, looking for domestic live-in work, the only option for a black single mother in 1970s South Africa, found Vasinthe in labour (possibly after being attacked by her then husband, Muhsin) on her kitchen floor. An unusual household emerged from this: with Gloria and Vasinthe living together with the two boys.

Each member of the family resists the apartheid regime in their own way. Gloria stands up to the extreme violence of apartheid in small-town South Africa. Vasinthe's mother died after a car crash while waiting for a 'non-white' ambulance. Gloria's mother, who lived for a long time in the small independent state of Bophuthatswana, safeguards the family's memory of British brutality and double-crossing against the local people. Meanwhile other memories focus on the three young people's participation in the key moments in the last years of apartheid: student demonstrations, driving to the freeing of Nelson Mandela, the first democratic elections.

Between these personal and family memories, the book refers to several historical documents, both authentic and imagined. As Linda Hutcheon says, historiographical metafiction can re-appropriate dominant texts, questioning their authority.

> Intertextual parody of canonical classics is one mode of reappropriating and reformulating – with significant changes – the dominant white, male, middle-class, European culture. It does not reject it, for it cannot. It signals its dependence by its use of the canon, but asserts its rebellion through ironic abuse of it.[138]

Graffiti and writing onto existing texts plays an important role in this process within the novel, with several examples of collaborative or subverted texts.

> On the tube, Kagiso notices a picture of a family strolling on an idyllic private beach. [...] On the golden sands of the beach, someone has scribbled:
> 'The world is not your private holiday destination. People *live* here and *they* probably don't have access to this beach.'[139]

These parodic responses tend to restore the missing, or replace that which has been removed from the original, dominant narrative.

> Historiographic metafictions … employ parody not only to restore history and memory in the face of the distortions of the "history of forgetting" (Thiher 202), but also, at the same time, to put into question the authority of any act of writing by locating the discourses of both history and fiction within an ever-expanding intertextual network that mocks any notion of either single origin or simple causality.[140]

An extremely self-conscious text, *The Silent Minaret* questions even itself, providing mocking clues for how it is to be read.

> Listen to this, he once told her before reading aloud from the book in front of him. Reading is inevitably a complex, comparative process. A novel in particular, if it is not to be read reductively as an item of socio-political evidence, involves the reader with itself not only because of its writer's skill but also because of other novels.[141]

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[138] Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction," 12.
[139] Shukri, *The Silent Minaret*, 2006, 189.
[140] Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction," 11–12.
[141] Shukri, *The Silent Minaret*, 2006, 148.

Here Shukri is very clearly situating his text (out of Issa's mouth) as a work of historiographical metafiction. Not only is *The Silent Minaret* intimately connected with other novels, but with history works and history itself, the fictional texts within it such as Kagiso's journal and Issa's thesis, and the city of London itself, which thus functions as a text to be deciphered by Kagiso.

> ... only a round blue plaque, like the one outside Lord Reith's, from the Greater London Council, reveals why Kagiso felt compelled to investigate Issa's mention of this address [...] in his notebook:
> TE Lawrence
> "Lawrence of Arabia"
> 1888-1935 lived here[142]

Through its missing protagonist, *The Silent Minaret* continually emphasises the impossibility of describing a fictional life without turning to other texts, and employs the city of London to demonstrate this impossibility.

> What emerges, as the fragments surface, is a man insisting on a common humanity, finding ways to link belief systems and ideologies even as he witnesses a world being divided into two. Issa's sense of unity appears to pull together the African and the Arab world, the homeless refugees, the disappeared street people, the invisibles, 'Europe's untouchables' and the elderly who must endure 'portable altars, portable surgeries, portable meals'.[143]

Issa's mother Vasinthe, a doctor, cannot understand why her son would deliberately go missing. Discussing the matter with her colleague, who spent years in exile in London after defying the apartheid regime, she doesn't know what Issa might still have to fight for.

> "The struggle's *over*, Peter."
> He looked at her. "No, Vasinthe, the struggle's never over," and then turned away. "There is a lot in Britain to alienate a young idealist. 'Inglan is a bitch', Vasinthe."[144]

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[142] Shukri, 120.
[143] Jacana Press, "Fiction, Poetry & Literary Criticism: The Silent Minaret,", http://www.jacana.co.za/book-categories/fiction-poetry-a-writing/the-silent-minaret-detail (accessed 9th March, 2017).
[144] Shukri, *The Silent Minaret*, 2006, 200.

The lines of the Linton Kwesi Johnson poem situate Issa in a long line of angry young men in London, mistreated for their accents and the colour of their skin. For Vasinthe, London is Russell Square and the university, but Peter, who was an angry young man there himself, can see how the British capital might intensify, rather than dissipate, the feelings of marginalisation that apartheid imprinted on Issa. Moreover, 2003 was a particularly difficult time for a young man with a Muslim name and South Asian origins.

However, the novel will not explain where Issa has gone, although it hints at three possibilities. As Jayawardane points out,

> Issa realises that "natives" and "others", as they come closer to understanding how the structures of power are constructed and forcibly strengthened, are often forcibly "disappeared" because of the threat they pose.[145]

Issa, othered in South Africa, has been unable to stay silent about the othering processes he witnesses in London. Throughout the novel he fastidiously refuses to touch any surfaces while out, using instead a handkerchief to open doors and lift cups. There is a sense that he himself may have fallen victim to the shadowy forces he was working to challenge.

> The history of early European exploration and settlement at the Cape of Good Hope remains universally and eternally present.[146]

Issa has been deeply affected by 'history repeating' in the run-up to the wars on Afghanistan and Iraq, and by the new suspicion and prejudice against Muslims in the UK and further afield. He himself has a complex identity: a black brother, an absent Muslim father, while his mother is of Hindu background. 'We are all Arabs now'[147] is one of the last things he says to

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[145] M. Neelika Jayawardane, "'Forget Maps': Documenting Global Apartheid and Creating Novel Cartographies in Ishtiyaq Shukri's The Silent Minaret," *Research in African Literatures* 45, no. 1 (2014): 1–23, 8.
[146] Auerbach, cited in Shukri, *The Silent Minaret*, 2006, 63.
[147] Shukri, 224.

Katinka, who herself is learning Arabic in preparation for moving to Palestine. Issa's commitment to activism, which nearly got him blown up in South Africa, might possibly have led him to act in solidarity with these Arabs, leaving London to join a new struggle.

A third possibility is indicated by strange experiences both Katinka and Kagiso have with the River Thames, indelibly bound up with the opening of *Heart of Darkness*. After a long day searching for Issa, Kagiso finds himself sitting on steps leading down to the rapidly rising river.

> And then, with a determined tug, she takes him and pulls him into her. He offers no resistance, lets the river roll him over, caress him gently and take him back down to sleep.[148]

Kagiso suddenly begins to fight against the river, struggling back to shore without his shoes. Katinka, too, has a sort of fantasy of being swept away.

> When she closes her eyes and rests her head on the dark black tide, the river will take her gently down to sleep. [149]

Running smoothly through the chaos of the city, the Thames offers 'sleep', 'rest', 'caresses' to the exhausted migrants. No conclusions are offered by the novel, but it offers the possibility that Issa has given in to her call. When a person disappears, their other secrets come to light, and throughout the novel a picture emerges of the vanished man. Like many 'missing' characters, he becomes a blank page onto whom others can project their thoughts and feelings, particularly after his disappearance. (Vasinthe and Katinka both continue to send him messages after he disappears). In other ways, he's full of surprises: likeable, popular, haunted, good-looking like his vanished father, and determined. And as he leaves, he sheds a textual skin across London: emails and text messages, his thesis left behind in the

[148] Shukri, 130.
[149] Shukri, 169.

shisha café, underlined and marked pages in his books, an article left with the upstairs neighbour, Frances. These metatextual references gain their importance from his disappearance.

Parallels, Lists and Crossings

Shortly after Kagiso arrives in London, he sees a piece of graffiti in the bathroom of a Brick Lane restaurant.

> It started with: Bangladesh used to be East Pakistan. To this had been added: Pakistan used to be India. The chain rolled on: Israel used to be Palestine / Lebanon used to be Syria / Eritrea used to be Ethiopia / Alsace used to be France then Germany then France / America used to be England / England used to be France. Alongside this main chain ran a parallel chain, around which someone had drawn a huge bracket which pointed to the heading, insha'allah: One day Basque will have been Spain / Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland will have been Britain / Tibet will have been China / Palestine will have been Israel / Chechnya will have been Russia.[150]

The graffiti follows a pattern of long lists of place-names which recurs in the novel, and is reproduced in full here to highlight the multiple instances when international concerns are brought to London, much as Kagiso's own plane journey frames the text itself. Plane journeys are sometimes seen as reducing travel to a few hours in an enclosed space, but Kagiso's return to South Africa is experienced as arduous, evoking the bloody trail marked out across the African continent by European colonialism.

> He focuses, follows the red route of their flight path from London as it snakes its way, like a river of blood, through the African continent in the dead of night: France / across the Mediterranean / Algeria / Chad / Niger...[151]

[150] Shukri, 37–38.
[151] Shukri, 208.

Kagiso does not appear to follow a specific plan in London. Apart from packing up Issa's things, he roams the city, looking for places that Issa has mentioned in his notebooks, scanning the faces of the homeless for his brother.

> He's heard that destitute people sometimes seek shelter on the Circle Line, so he spends several hours walking the length of the trains on this line, moving, like a beggar, from one carriage to the next at stations around the never-ending line, first clockwise: Notting Hill Gate / Bayswater / Edgware Road / Baker Street / Great Portland Street / Euston Square [...][152]

These lists of place names, recognisable enough to most readers, map Kagiso's movements over time, plotting the spaces he crosses as point on the Tube map, and yet simultaneously rendering them meaningless, *non-lieux* (see above, p. 33) which hold no connections for him, divorced from his search for Issa and Issa's thoughts.

At another moment on his journey, however, Kagiso finds himself on the London Eye looking down on the capital. No search for his brother is possible here; he enters rather into a state of detachment from the city, seeing it from an external perspective.

> And now, Kagiso is alone, high above the city. [...]
> It is vast. That is his first thought as the pod rises slowly to reveal the sprawl beyond the dense cacophony of architectural styles that jostle into a façade on the riverbank. [...] He is surprised by the location of things. So *that* is where that is in relation to that. And from up here it doesn't seem so far away from that, when it took ages to walk it the other day.
> But eventually he concludes, all cities seem the same.[153]

Parallels are drawn throughout the novel with different place across the world, much as the anonymous graffiti artists in the restaurant bathroom have taken inspiration from each other to recall more and more stateless nations. While London is presented as a place of

[152] Shukri, 122.
[153] Shukri, 128.

(limited) freedom, and has been the outside perspective from which Issa can write his thesis on South African history, it is never a place of escape from the 'Homelands'. London and South Africa are presented as different, but the history of each ceaselessly impacts on the other. Theron calls attention to the description of the raid on the mosque, which is alternated in the novel with descriptions of the violent repression of demonstrations in South Africa, and, as she says

> …highlights two prominent aspects of *The Silent Minaret*; first, the sense of past political injustices repeating themselves, and second, the sense of loyalty towards, or affiliation with, others due to understanding such repetition.[154]

Despite the wealth of specificity with which London is described, 'all cities seem the same'. A direct parallel is drawn with South Africa when Kagiso is confused by a place name shortly after arriving, a reminder of the process of (re)naming places in colonial territories, which sought to impose the symbolic power of the 'centre' upon the margins.

> "East London?" I checked, confused, when Katinka announced our destination. "But I've only just arrived."
> "Not *that* East London! East London here, where I live, in the East End, mate."[155]

Later, the parallel is repeated with darker connotations when the name Brixton reminds Kagiso of the infamously racist and violent Brixton Murder and Robbery Squad in Johannesburg. '"That shit still happens here [...] and Brixton Police Station is notorious for it."[156] At the same time, the diversity of London and the multi-directional cultural flow are

[154] Theron, "Reconstructing the Past, Deconstructing the Other"; "Fiction, Poetry & Literary Criticism: The Silent Minaret," 46.
[155] Shukri, *The Silent Minaret*, 2006, 37.
[156] Shukri, *The Silent Minaret*, 2006, 195.

noted, with Londoners playing on their city's complex heritage. "'Welcome to Londonistan," the waiter joked.'"[157]

All cities seem the same, but conversely, many cities are possible within the boundaries of London. Having taken Kagiso for a curry in the East End, Katinka also leads him to Edgware Road, to the Baghdad café which had been Issa's haunt and where she last saw him.

> "Many Londons," Katinka says, "and if Brick Lane is like the Meghna flowing through its East, then this is like the Euphrates, or the Tigris, or the Nile flowing through its west."[158]

Issa, Frances and Katinka, all migrants, have claimed a kind of authority in the city, but Kagiso remains an outsider, frequently lost or at a loss as he navigates the complex city, while Issa's mother Vasinthe keeps to the streets that she knows.

> "And do you always stay on Russell Square?"
> Vasinthe nods. "It's my corner of London."[159]

(Re)Mapping Memory and History onto the City

In *The Silent Minaret*, as in the other two novels, the geographical distance traversed in migratory journeys is conflated and distorted; the novels force physical space to give way in order to emphasise other kinds of closeness and distance. In particular, among these is a drive to re-historicise events recalled with elliptical romance, to bring colonial histories which happened 'in the margins' back to the centre, and to write that which has been erased back into the histories of Rome, Paris and London. The migratory journeys of the

[157] Shukri, *The Silent Minaret*, 2006, 37.
[158] Shukri, 189.
[159] Shukri, 137–38.

protagonists are employed to carry stories from their countries of origin into the heart of the European capitals.

> "Yes, I saw these things with my own eyes. That's why I'm here. That's why I'm *here* and not *there*. That's why I'm fucking here!" He wipes his eyes with Issa's face as though it were a handkerchief. The leaflet leaves ink stains across the man's eyes where he has wiped away his tears[160]

In *The Silent Minaret*, this is even more destabilised by other links: the characters do not make only one migratory journey; Katinka is planning to continue into West Asia and Palestine, and the parallels between politics in Palestine, in South Africa, and in the UK are repeatedly re-established, with an emphasis on the people who populate and who continue to resist racist and colonial state control in its shifting forms.

> It reads: like the olive tree, we were here before this went up. Like the olive tree, we'll be here when it comes down. 'Ons polla hier!'[161]

As Theron says, any call to understanding and affiliation with others in the novel is not based on an idea of shared heritage, but rather 'despite' the lack of it. The reader is asked to make links between different identities: the white Afrikaaner girl, black boy and boy of Indian heritage during the last days of apartheid; the Bangladeshi waiters, the unhinged Zimbabwean man, the Palestinian freedom fighter.

> It does so by unravelling established and received notions of cultural identity, presenting the other - generally the projective object of threats and suspicion - in a different light through an understanding of historical repetition.[162]

This unravelling process highlights the shifting, complex identities of the main characters, and shows how personal identity itself is connected to place; is even mapped onto place;

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[160] Shukri, 127.
[161] Shukri, 241. 'We are here!' (Afrikaans).
[162] Theron, "Reconstructing the Past, Deconstructing the Other."

but this mapping process does not have a fixing or paralysing effect on identity itself. Identity remains contingent, unfixed, changing: the three novels map it lightly onto the city, in a manner reminiscent of Igiaba Scego's post-it notes. Theron's observations on the overlapping, intricately linked historical episodes which arise in the novel, and the ways in which single historical records are consistently challenged, can be applied in different ways to all three novels.

All three describe a search: in *The Silent Minaret* this is for a missing person, in *Mia casa* for the city that really belongs to the protagonist, and in *La Seine était rouge*, the main characters are searching both for the missing pieces from her family's story and for the visible acknowledgement of Algerian oppression on the streets of Paris. These searches recall the *medical* definition of anamnesis, which describes the reconstructive process of a doctor trying to establish the causes of a medical condition by discussing symptoms and events with sufferers. [163]

Anne Donadey explains anamnesis in her introduction to the special edition of *Studies in Twentieth Century Literature* on French imperialism and memory.[164]

> In the first case, anamnesis is the piecing together of a case history by a professional with the help and expertise of a group of people who have experienced the illness in question. In the second case, it is a collective ritual repetition of fundamental beliefs about certain foundational religious events. In both contexts, the term connotes a common *reconstitution* effected according to preordained rules, involving one central person's life history, and opening up onto future healing consequences. [my emphasis][165]

[163] *Anamnesis*: the recalling to memory of things past; the recollection of the Platonic pre-existence; a patient's account of his or her medical history. Ian Brookes, *The Chambers Dictionary* (Chambers, 2006).
[164] Anne Donadey, "Between Amnesia and Anamnesis: Re-Membering the Fractures of Colonial History."
[165] Donadey, "Between Amnesia and Anamnesis".

This piecing together happens in each of the novels through a series of writing and realia, rendered textually but echoed as pictures, letters, maps, graffiti written onto the city itself. Moreover all three books break the narrative flow to produce 'historical facts' or 'historical moments', usually conveyed to the reader by one of the characters, but in the style of factual historical discourse. Thus the novels also question their own internal truths, widening the discourse to include both fact and fiction.

This chapter has attempted to reveal different strategies used in novels of migration to explore history through mapping, and identity through positionality. All three novels shy from simple answers to the questions they pose. All three bring the city into action as a site of interrogation, a petri dish through which to look at postcolonial and multinational links and conflicts more widely. The chapter's title, *Writing onto the City*, attempts to reflect on how the novel itself becomes part of the city it describes, just as the city itself becomes a character within the novel.

These are bold claims, and perhaps further research is called for to really explore the idea of the city in the text (and vice versa) as a contemporary narrative strategy in writing on migration. But a final point is important: a great deal of the important thinking about the three capital cities takes place in a third place (a third space?) away from both the sending country and the country of arrival. Omer and Amel leave Paris for Alexandria in Egypt; the Igiaba character in *La Mia Casa* begins her mapping of Rome while visiting family in Manchester; and the last word in *The Silent Minaret* comes from Katinka, sending text

messages from the shadow of the wall dividing the West Bank to the phone of a man who has disappeared and does not answer.

> One day, Katinka is reminded of something Issa wrote. At the time she thought it might be overstated, but he wouldn't change it. Now she thinks he was right and sends a text message to his mobile number, as she still does from time to time:
> Im by da wal@qalqilia. Wen jan landd @cape he plantd a hedj 2 sepr8 setlaz frm locls. Da histry of erly urpean setlmnt @da cape is unversly&eternly pertnt x[166]

The questions which the characters tried to answer in South Africa, which they carried with them to London, are 'universally and eternally pertinent.'

[166] Shukri, *The Silent Minaret*, 2006, 242.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to map the representation of the European city in recent novels of migration. The primary aim of this research project was to provide a timely contribution to the field of comparative literature, and literature of migration in particular, through a close reading of novels about migration to London, Paris and Rome. It does not approach the three cities or language groups in turn, but instead has chosen a thematic structure, conceptualised through a spatial approach both to the city and the novels which describe it. In so doing, it eludes a simplistic relationship with the identity of France, Italy and the UK in order to disrupt any reading of the three cities as bound up with nationalisms and to suggest transnational parallels between the different texts.

Nonetheless, the work here is limited to a European literary field written in European languages, and the potential suggested by further research in non-European languages forms one of the limitations of this study. However the scope of this research is justified by the selection of primary texts. The works studied here are written in local languages by authors based in the three areas, and thus it is understood that they are largely produced for a European readership. It is no exaggeration, therefore, to suggest that they convey stories and experiences of migration to readers who do not necessarily have first-hand experience of migratory journeys, and through this, they provide a small but significant literary bastion of resistance to the growing xenophobic discourse we are currently witnessing across Europe.

While this comparative project has read texts from the three different cities side by side, it has also proffered some analysis of the differences between the three fields. The framework of 'mapping' meant that to engage with the novels was also to engage with the cities, and following on from a detailed analysis of the recent history of migration literature in France, Italy and the UK in the Literature Review, the thesis has contextualised its analysis with a discussion of colonial history, migration policy and attitudes towards integration which are specific to each city. Over a hundred novels formed the research background, and they elliptically reveal much about French, Italian and British attitudes to alterity, including popular, media and political representations of migration and migrants. In so doing, however, this study has attempted to engage with literary accounts from the migrants' perspective, and thus to unsettle hierarchised political discourses and established understandings of *who is studied* and *who does the studying*.

The study overall is concerned with the relationship between the novel and the city, and in so doing makes a contribution to a wider field of contemporary literary study: that of spatial analysis and the city in the novel more widely. Through its engagement with urban space as depicted in novels of migration, it set out a number of strategies for understanding the city within fiction. These include the positioning of the individual within urban space, processes of othering within the city, the porous boundaries between 'interior' and 'exterior' spaces, particularly for marginalised subjects, and the city as it is imagined, learned, contested and memorialised. Throughout these different investigations, the thesis highlighted the small strategies by which people who are 'othered' resist their marginalisation, and interrogated the categories of *travelling* and *settling*, suggesting that even these categories offer only a limited understanding of the migratory experience. If movement between countries or

continents is different to other ways in which people move around the world or their own country, this is primarily a legal difference.

Similarly, a simplistic interpretation of the migratory experience as a single move from a sending country to a final destination is questioned within this thesis. The thesis has repeatedly emphasized that the trope of *arrival* does not necessarily signify the *end of the journey*. Several of the novels, including *La Seine était rouge* and *Forest Gate*, recount a continuing journey beyond the original migration, and several of the authors, such as Amara Lakhous and Abdourahman A. Waberi, continue to move flexibly *between* European cultures and cities.[1] The process of mapping the city, read as a decolonising act after Deleuze and Guattari, offers a literary analysis which expands beyond the individuals who populate the novels. Instead the focus is shifted onto the city itself as an entity, as a lived experience and as the geographic framework enables and limits the movement of the characters in the novels.

The four main approaches to urban space suggested in this thesis do not amount to a comprehensive study of the city within fiction of migration. While the author is currently working on a complementary research paper on the 'imagined city', which focuses on the city as it is described and understood before and during the act of migration, several other approaches would broaden the scope of this research without in any way exhausting the field. The proliferation of borders arises several times in different contexts throughout the thesis, yet it does not include a comprehensive study of how these are enacted through the

[1] Akinti, *Forest Gate*; Sebbar, *La Seine Etait Rouge*.

institutions of the city. This is an important trope in the novels studied here and across the wider field: bordering processing and marginalisation through within the migrant's experience of banks or schools; of access to services; within employment and accommodation. It is certain that these themes occur with regularity within the works studied, and so it would be important to add an analysis of how institutions disseminate power structures and how interactions with state infrastructure are complicated by the migrant's citizenship status and her/his newness in the city within fiction of migration.

While a very small number of the novels studied in this thesis, such as the works of Zadie Smith and, to a lesser extent, Alain Mabanckou and Amara Lakhous, have been popularly received as mainstream works of fiction and indeed translated into other languages, a great deal of these novels have been publicly received, and even categorised within academic criticism, as fiction of migration only, or presented as of special interest to Black or 'BAME' readers. A doctoral study on 'novels of migration' cannot avoid the simplifying implications of categorising its novels by theme, but this thesis has shown the huge variety of a rapidly growing field, both by deliberately selecting diverse primary texts, and by comparing the sophisticated literary strategies they employ to complicate narratives of migration.

As far as this categorisation goes, there are significant factors beyond the text, including issues of publication and reception as well as the identity and public perception of the author. *Forest Gate* was only published in the US, which is an interesting signifier of *othering* within the reception to the novels.[2] Its author, Peter Akinti, was interviewed more than

[2] Akinti, *Forest Gate*.

once at the time of publication, but these interviews and the corresponding reviews of *Forest Gate* appeared principally in the American media. [3] The struggles of young refugees and people of colour in inner city London, it appears, hold more interest to an overseas audience than for the local population. Considering also that there are no reviews of Itoua-Ndinga's *Le Roman des Immigrés* either in an academic or in a media context, there is strong indication that in order to emerge from the category of writing *for* the other, *by* the other, literature of migration must offer a wider appeal. This thesis, with its focus on close reading and spatial analysis, has chosen not to focus on publication, dissemination and reception, but these offer a possibility for further research which might expand upon the findings presented here.

Other authors of migration fiction, conversely, become spokespeople for certain groups, ethnicities or experiences. Abdellah Taïa appears regularly on television in France as a prominent queer North African, and contributes to newspapers including *Le Monde* and *Libération*.[4] Similarly, Igiaba Scego and Cristina Ubah Ali Farah are prominent commentators in Italy and beyond, disseminating the voice of so-called *Nuovi Italiani*.[5]

A further group of the authors studied in this thesis are not necessarily primarily known as writers on migration. While Alain Mabanckou has written four novels which deal with the experiences of Africans in Paris, he is internationally recognised as the author of *African*

[3] Simon & Schuster Books, *Peter Akinti: Forest Gate*, accessed October 14, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NCSR-QG50Zw.
[4] Carbajal, "The Wanderings of a Gay Moroccan"; "Interview." [*inter alia*].
[5] Alessandra Coppola, "Nuovi Italiani - Corriere Della Sera"; Flavia Amabile, "Tra i Primi Nuovi Italiani Del 2016 Un Picco Di Figli Di Immigrati"; Grasso, "Adua: Intervista a Igiaba Scego"; Claire Jacobson, "Between Two Worlds: An Exclusive Interview with Ubah Cristina Ali Farah - Asymptote Blog."

Psycho, a genre-defying dark comedy which parodies Brett Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*.[6] Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* is certainly a novel of migration, but although she continues to discuss the diversity of London and different ways of negotiating *otherness*, her work has moved away from foregrounding the experiences of migrants.

This combination of celebrated and unknown authors, and the wide preliminary research into dozens of little known novels which preceded the selection of the novels studied, is one of the major original contributions of this thesis to its field. It is the first major study of recent literature of migration across three European countries, and this transnational comparison allows for a foregrounding of the city rather than the nation state, of the individual rather than the collective moving from one country to another, and of a plethora of literary techniques rather than a single type of narrative.

Finally, a fundamental principle of literary analysis underpins this thesis. While engaging with considerations of literary and popular success in art, it considers that the essential task of academic study is to consider what is visible and what is heard in terms of power. If we are to do our jobs, that which is rendered invisible or which remains unheard must be brought into the light. For this reason, this thesis concludes with a reminder of the need to consider stories of migration, both as literary texts and as an integral part of a radical discourse. To travel is to dream, and so this thesis has aimed to contribute to human

[6] Alain Mabanckou, *Verre Cassé* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2006); Mabanckou, *Bleu, blanc, rouge*; Mabanckou, *Tais-Toi Et Meurs by Mabanckou, Alain (July 10, 2014) Mass Market Paperback*; Alain Mabanckou, *Black Bazar: Roman* (Heyne, 2011); Alain Mabanckou, *African Psycho* (Serpent's Tail, 2017); Bret Easton Ellis, *American Psycho* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2010).

knowledge along parallel lines to Tom, from Darfur, who is mentioned in the Introduction. “I am going to tell my story”, he said.[7]

[7] “Tom”, Last Name Withheld, Informal discussion.

Appendix 1: Notes on Translation

Unless otherwise stated, this thesis uses published English translations of the main novels where available. It also employs English translations of secondary sources where a published English translation is available.

As many of the primary and secondary sources are not available in English, the author has provided translations from Italian and French where appropriate, referencing the original text and noting in footnotes which sections have been translated.

There are a couple of notable exceptions: I myself translated all works by Alain Mabanckou from French. This is due to a series of errors in evidence in the Indiana Press translation of *Bleu-Blanc-Rouge.*[1] For consistency, it seemed appropriate to translate all the author's works myself.

While every care has been taken to avoid error and to translate as accurately as possible, the translated excerpts throughout this thesis concentrate on conveying meaning rather than remaining faithful to the spirit of the entire original text. The result is thus not a literary translation but a careful rendition of the text at sentence and paragraph level, and occasionally includes a French or Italian word in *italics* where this is important to reveal the original intention. Aesthetics thus takes second place to general sense.

[1] Mabanckou, *Blue White Red*.

Appendix 2: Definitions of Important Words

'Country of Origin/ Sending Country' This thesis uses the terms 'sending country' and 'country of arrival' where relevant to refer to the countries from and to which migration has occurred, bearing in mind that the migration described in the works studied may not be the only international movement in the lives of the characters. 'Country of origin' usually describes an ethnic background or national affiliation, as described by the migrant. 'Host' country and 'home' country are considered as problematic terms which may prejudge the causes and effects of migratory journeys even before they take place, and are only used in citation.

'Migrant' has been used throughout to describe an actor in an international journey for the purposes of living for a prolonged period (but not necessarily forever) in a different nation state. Where possible the terms 'immigrant' and 'emigrant' have been avoided: in an attempt to treat the loaded language of international movement in as neutral a manner as possible, one term applies to all those who move to a different place: 'migrant'. When this journey takes place within one country, it is of course referred to as 'internal migration', but this occurs rarely within the scope of this project.

This is not to say that 'refugee' and 'asylum seeker' do not have their place in this text when appropriate, (see below) but with the caveat that refugees and asylum seekers are here understood to be two categories of migrants. Following the authors of *Go Home? The*

Politics of Immigration Controversies, this thesis does 'not refer to descendants of migrants as migrants unless they themselves have also moved between countries, nor as second- or third- generation migrants.'[1] 'Economic migrant' is not used: this thesis, like most contemporary studies of migration, recognises that even when refugee status is not accorded, most migratory journeys are influenced by a complex mixture of 'push' and 'pull' factors.

Finally, the term 'illegal' is not used for a migrant whose documents or residency status is under question or not in accord with local laws, for obvious reasons. When it is necessary to define a migrant's legal status the terms 'irregular' or 'undocumented' are used as adjectives.

'Asylum seeker' and 'refugee' are used in their legal sense, as codified in the 'UNHCR Master Glossary of Terms' following the 1951 Geneva Convention.[2] This means that people seeking sanctuary 'because of a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion'[3] are referred to as asylum seekers, as are those who describe themselves as such. 'Refugee' is applied to those who have received a legal confirmation of international protection.

'Migration Literature' In general, the novels under examination in this thesis will be referred to as 'migration literature', 'literature of migration' (used interchangeably) or

[1] Jones et al., *Go Home?*, 16.
[2] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "UNHCR Master Glossary of Terms" (Rev. 1, June 2006), https://www.refworld.org/docid/42ce7d444.html.
[3] "What's the Difference between a Refugee and an Asylum Seeker?," *Amnesty International Australia* (blog), January 23, 2019, https://www.amnesty.org.au/refugee-and-an-asylum-seeker-difference/.

'novels of migration', a term which also frequently arises in France (écriture de migration') and Italy ('letteratura della migrazione) in both academic and literary reviews. This follows my decision to select sources thematically (rather than within genre, or by the author's origins) as well as emphasising a new interest in the theme across all three areas. It follows a classification suggested by Russell King, Paul Connell and Paul White, which 'draws a distinction between the largely auto-biographical work of migrants themselves with their direct, personal accounts of migration, and general fiction by [...] 'professional' writers which reflects either directly or indirectly on migration.'[4]

'Black' and 'people of colour': The thesis uses 'Black' following John Clement Ball's work on London writing of migration, and James Procter's Writing Black Britain 1948-1998, while acknowledging that within case studies in France and Italy other definitions may arise. Procter uses 'Black' to refer to an ''imagined community' comprising Caribbean, African and South Asian experience in Britain'.

> [Procter's anthology] privileges 'black', not as a biological or racial category (though it signifies on both these levels) but as a political signifier which first became valent in Britain in the late 1960s and 1970s.

'Black' is thus used as an assumed identity or means of self-description, whereas when it is necessary to emphasise that an experience or an identity stems from an external perception of the subject as other than white, or the description rests on external appearance, the term 'person of colour' is employed, as a useful but limited strategy to disrupt the status of 'whiteness' as a default or neutral identity. This applies on occasion when the author is called upon to describe the racialised identity of a character. The term 'BAME' (Black, Asian,

[4] John Connell, Russell King, and Paul White, eds., *Writing Across Worlds: Literature and Migration* (London: Routledge, 1995), 10.

or Minority Ethnic), which has gained currency as a wider political signifier in recent years, is used where official statistics or reports on ethnic/'racial' identity make this relevant, but otherwise avoided as a potentially othering term.

Since this thesis uses a wide range of case studies selected by theme (migration, migrant experiences, journeys and resettling) and location (the major capital cities of Western Europe), rather than privileging an ethnic identity, country of origin or sending country, not all of the fiction of migration is 'Black' writing. For example, I posit in my section about Italian migrant writing that writers of Somali origin in Rome share certain common experiences with writers from Albania and the former Yugoslav states. It should also be noted that these categories tend to hold slightly different meanings in French and Italian. For ease of comprehension, all three terms are used in the context of relevant English-language study in the UK.

Racist and derogatory language

This thesis occasionally cites use of racist language such as 'n----r', and the decision has been taken to reproduce this in full in-text. When this is in French or Italian, the original word has been left untranslated. While variations on this word and other racist language have differing levels of social acceptability across the three countries, this thesis takes the view that they convey a similar derogatory and racist meaning as the corresponding English words, and expects the reader to understand them in this light.

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